

## I Just Want To Be (Alive)

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# I Just Want To Be (Alive)

by [paradoxalriven](#)

## Summary

“Have you ever seen the sky, Sapnap?” he asks, running his fingers along the edge of one screen. Underneath them, the server hums, and it almost feels like his palms tingle.

George stays quiet. Eventually, Sapnap has to admit, “...No. Never. Not—not outside of vids and shit.”

“Yeah,” Dream breathes, staring hungrily at the map showing him where the compound opens up to air and nothing else. He knew that the Empire was rich, but it isn’t until now that he realizes how rich. “Me neither. When am I ever going to get a chance like this again?”

Wilbur hires the Dream Team to kill the one thing standing in his way: the rulers of the Antarctic Empire, the oldest conglomerate in the city. This has consequences none of them could imagine.

## Notes

Please give huge thanks to SlightlyAfterDark for betaing this absolute monster, for without them there would be no fic to post. Send extreme amounts of violence to Drugs (the person) for the fact that this is all one go and not chaptered. Take your fucking long oneshot, you animal.

(Content warning: there are images embedded in this fic, some of which have flickering. I tried to keep the refresh rate low enough to avoid issues, but if you're prone to issues with that sort of thing, be aware going in.)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The soft drip of blood on the floor is the only sound in the room.

It's never quiet, Deep Down. Too many people crammed in too small a space, carving out niches for themselves between the pipes and the wiring, sometimes literally in the bedrock when they get far enough down. The Topsiders call it the Under, but that's never been the name they chose for themselves; they're Deep Down, because that's a description as much as anything else, but none of them have ever willingly laid down for the boot on their necks.

He rolls his neck now, feeling something pop, then lifts a hand to his mask and taps the side of it.

"So that was fast," Dream says, looking around as information scrolls across his retinas. Coordinates, temperature, humidity, and a running chat of some of the local IRCs. People think his mask holds that information, but there's no room for it, not with the ventilators and armor and the cybernetics to keep its display running.

The eyes were expensive, but they were worth it. More than they'd be worth to anyone else, because the server loves him, and it feeds him a little bit extra on top of that.

"Small crew," George comments, the soft clatter of his keyboard in the background. "I don't know why they hired us, this is something anyone with half a brain could do."

"You're so nice to me George. I don't know why I ever listen to anyone else, when you can—you can whisper sweet n-nothings in my ears." He's wheezing by the end of it, trying to choke back laughter as his sword folds back up into his arm sheath. The further he gets away from the bodies, the more sound starts to leak in—the dull thrum of the fans that keep air circulating down here, the soft buzz of electricity, the rattle of metal on metal from feet and wheels and god knows what else.

"You're an idiot," George says, but his feed updates with a location ping. Straight through the market. *Nice*.

"I'm your idiot, though. Admit it. You love me." Still grinning, he starts to climb a ladder, past one level, then another. By the time he's sixty feet up, the mechanical sounds of his environment have been overwhelmed by the much more organic sounds of a crowd. People shouting, sellers hawking their wares, the thud of music, laughter and sobbing and the hundred other noises people make when they're alive.

He breathes in, though the ventilator in his mask scrubs the dusty, used taste out of the air, and pretends like he can smell the rich scent of cooking food as he steps into the crowd.

No one comments on his appearance as he filters between people. He's not even the weirdest looking one, with his mask that fully covers his head and the faint glow of his arms. Out here in Purgatory, modders are as common as dirt—it's only once people head over to places like the Nether that the freaks start creeping in, as suspicious of gene splicing and cybernetics as the rest of the world is of *them*. There's real hybrids in the Nether, supposedly, but that's not his turf anymore. Dream only goes there if he needs something, never to socialize.

“Do we want takeout?” he asks, turning his head to look at a stall where something mouthwatering is being served. It feels like he never has time to cook properly anymore.

“Sapnap already brought some,” George says, huffing softly. “So hurry up, before he eats it all.”

“Not even going to offer to save it for me?” He finds another ladder and starts climbing, past one of the massive ventilation shafts that keeps Purgatory livable. The coords flash in the corner of his eyesight, a tiny beacon leading him back home.

“Starve,” George tells him, before disconnecting from the call. Dream laughs softly, again, hauling himself onto a balcony, then across some pipes, using the crumbling facade of a building to navigate across the busy street below. The sound of the crowd is quieter up here, and he’s not high up enough to touch the next level of the Deep Down, so all that accompanies him is the buzz of neon.

Their apartment is near Purgatory’s entrance, the old maintenance elevator that the city used to keep its underside running, once upon a time. It still works, heavy and trundling as it lifts through the levels to the appropriately inhabited Midgard, where people are *meant* to be. But Midgard is in the city proper, which means identification chips, enforcers crawling the streets and tagging anyone without one, and people getting dragged away for the crime of existing where the server can’t see them.

Or, more accurately, where the server operators can’t see them. Dream knows that the server doesn’t care; the only thing it cares about is the smooth operation of its functions, the AI purring to itself when the water runs and the power brings the lights back on in Midgard, in Elysium. Topside.

Underneath his mask, his lip curls in a sneer, but it’s not directed at the server. The AI can’t help loving its people, and it can’t help not having the hands to properly fix things. It has to rely on the operators that claim to speak for it and the vanishingly few admins that it trusts enough to give full control. The operators are corrupt, in the pockets of the corporations that ruined the city in the first place, and the admins are all too afraid to show their faces, knowing that it's a death sentence to be loved by the server.

He brushes one unfeeling palm along the ventilation shaft before he climbs up onto his balcony. Beneath the smooth metal of his hand, the server hums with joy.

“You better not have eaten everything,” he calls as he crawls through the window, snapping it shut behind himself as he reaches up to unhook the mask from his head. It comes apart in two pieces, the helmet that fits around his skull and jaw, then the visor that slides smoothly into place and flickers with his chosen images.

He doesn’t bother changing out of the rest of his clothes as he heads for the kitchen. Thank fuck, Sapnap has *not* eaten all the food, and he’s glaring at Dream when he starts making himself a plate.

“A little thanks would be appreciated, you know,” Sapnap complains as Dream thumps down on the couch next to him.

“Thanks, Sapnap,” Dream says, mocking and insincere, before turning his attention to where George sits with a laptop open. “Have we got another job lined up? I’m getting bored.”

“You’re such a baby.” He can *hear* the way George is rolling his eyes, even if he can’t see them behind the polarized acrylic on his goggles. It’s funny, because George is a freak too—he doesn’t trust mods, he says, not even for something as simple as fixing his eyes. Worse, he’s pure human, so he can’t even use the vanishingly rare claim of being a hybrid to hide behind.

“It’s not my fault you keep picking easy ones.” He shakes his head, watching the IRCs light up with news of enforcers coming down to stir up trouble again. “I’m sick of easy kills. If we’re going to pick up jobs anyone can do, we’re going to get a shit reputation.”

“He’s got a point,” Sapnap says, snapping his fingers until a flame flickers at the end of one. “Fuck, I could’ve done this one. Not that I’m worse than Dream, obviously, I’d kick his ass any day—”

“Dream on, Sapnap,” he scoffs, before laughing when Sapnap makes a grab for his food.

“The only thing you’re *on* is my shitlist, Dream.” Sapnap laughs too, dismissing the flame before leaning back on the couch and sighing. “We have *got* to have better offers than this.”

“There is... *one* offer.” George’s voice is oddly reluctant, and Dream pauses in his attempt to pull Sapnap into a headlock. Both of them look over, and with a thought, he dismisses his usual feed and pulls up the limited haptic one the server provides, tracking George’s respiration, his heartbeat, all the little things the identification chip behind his ear is set to trace.

Nervous, but not lying. That’s interesting.

“Well? Don’t keep us waiting.” When George doesn’t answer immediately, Sapnap rolls his eyes and throws himself to his feet, pacing over to the armchair to peer over George’s shoulder. It doesn’t work, because George just snaps the laptop closed and scowls at him.

“I didn’t say anything before because—well, I know how you guys feel about L’manburg,” George says, setting the laptop to the side and folding his arms. “But—”

“No buts,” Dream interrupts, standing with his now empty plate in hand. “They’re *assholes*, George. Like, the biggest assholes in the fucking city. And we’re killers, not terrorists, so there’s nothing we have to offer them anyways.”

“This wouldn’t be a—” George looks at Dream’s scowl, Sapnap’s incredulous expression, and huffs. “See, this is why I didn’t want to bring it up. I knew you were going to do this. You’re so predictable.”

“Okay, *George*, tell us what the offer is.” Sapnap sounds disbelieving, like he can’t even picture how George would think this was a bright idea. Dream’s in the same boat, and he pretends like he isn’t listening as he heads for the kitchen to do his part with the dishes.

Because seriously, the *last* person they should be taking jobs from is Wilbur Soot. Not that the man doesn't have his own admirable qualities—if nothing else, Dream can appreciate someone that goddamn crazy and dedicated to achieving his goals. The problem is that the L'manburg independence movement is a weak justification for tearing down the pharma corps so Wilbur can take over the market instead. He's already cornered the drug trade in Limbo, pushed his spidery fingers into Purgatory and Hell, even made inroads on the Nether. He wants Deep Down; even worse, he wants Topside, and he'll stop at absolutely nothing to get it.

The last thing the city needs is Wilbur fucking Soot totally in control of its ample supply of drugs, both recreational and medicinal.

"It's an assassination job up in Elysium," George says from the other room, his heartbeat spiking and the readout flaring in the corner of Dream's sight. "Which is why you can't go, Sapnap, you don't have a chip. Wilbur wouldn't tell me anything else, not until I promised to meet with him. He says this is too dangerous to do over data."

"Sounds like a setup to me," Sapnap mutters, just loud enough for Dream to hear. The server helpfully provides what information it can give, respiration and the dilation of his pupils, a tentative diagnosis of anxiety.

It does sound like a setup. It also sounds like a challenge, a *real* challenge, and Dream hates himself a little bit for the way his own heartbeat kicks up at the thought.

"Why not start with Midgard?" he asks as he comes out of the kitchen, hopping on one foot as he starts to peel his boots off. "If he wants Topside, he should start with the rest of the city. Why go straight for someone in the one percent?"

"I don't know." George grimaces, then gestures at his laptop. "I didn't tell him no, but I didn't tell him yes either. I can't tell him *anything* until we make a decision one way or another, but you don't like L'manburg. You never have."

"Of course I don't," Dream says, dropping the other boot before reaching for his pants. "But I think maybe we should hear him out."

"Dream!"

"No, Sapnap, think about it. Whatever Wilbur wants, it's going to hit everyone down here eventually, right? He doesn't do small games." The pants get flung into the laundry basket after he digs his tools out of one of the pockets, the little things he needs because the city can't provide them with a touch.

"Which is why we shouldn't be listening to him at all!" Sapnap looks between them, then throws his hands up in the air in exasperation. "Okay, *morons*, don't come whining to me when this bites you in the ass."

"Whatever he wants, it's going to hit Deep Down eventually. I'd like to know what it is so we have time to prepare." He rolls his neck, then reaches for the hidden zipper on his bodysuit.

“So, George, set up a meeting. Not tonight, not tomorrow, but the day after. You and me, we’ll go, while Sapnap swings by Sam’s place to see if he’s heard anything.”

“You think Tommy would blab about Wilbur’s plans?” Sapnap asks doubtfully.

“I think Tommy trusts Sam more than Wilbur trusts us, and maybe we can use that,” Dream states as he heads for the bathroom—and a shower. “If not Tommy, then Tubbo. One way or another, we’re finding out what they’re up to.”

“Yeah, boss, whatever you say,” Sapnap mutters, punching George in the shoulder. “Come on, George, our glorious leader commands.”

“Shut up, Sapnap.”

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Limbo is two levels up and a few miles west of Purgatory. There’s a bigger transportation hub on this side, and it connects directly with the subway systems that service Midgard; if Purgatory and its night markets are one of the most easily accessed parts of Deep Down, then Limbo is a close second.

The joke, of course, is that the city’s garbage ends up in one or the other eventually. Dream thinks it’s a fairly apt joke, especially if someone is a poor bastard that gets their chip stolen. Purgatory and Limbo are as close as you can get to Midgard without one.

He’s dressed up in his working clothes again, his mask firmly on and George at his side. He knows that George has a feed on the interior of his goggles that matches the one scrolling over Dream’s retinas, and that they’re both tracking the same coordinates. Purgatory is noisy crowds and the wonderful smells of the markets, the steam rising from laundromats and restaurants before getting wicked away by the industrial fans, but Limbo is the rattle of power stations and the grind of trains flying over the rails above them. The streets where they live are so crowded with people that a bike couldn’t fit through them, but here they’re open enough for some of the hoverbikes and the occasional small self-driving car. Not too many, of course. Anything with a functioning VI is just begging to get scrapped and repurposed down here.

L’manburg is set up out of one of the old abandoned stations, their hub for selling their wares—sedatives and painkillers mostly, though he knows Wilbur makes a killing on antiretrovirals and antibiotics on the side—an old broken down train car that blocks the tunnel off. George knocks out a specific rhythm on the door, and they’re ushered in by Tommy moments later.

“Not here, gents,” he announces, heading deeper into the tunnel and for a ladder that goes down. “Wilbur’s been gettin’ all paranoid about this one.”

“Sounds like him,” George mutters, and Dream flashes the word DUMBASS across the front of his mask.

He doesn’t talk when he’s out in public. Not where people can hear him, anyways. The mask is set to mute anything he says to keep it from slipping out, so he can still keep on the line

with George and Sapnap, but he guards his voice as viciously as he does his face. Better for people to think that Dream is mute and faceless. Better for them to never connect anything with his name at all.

Tommy's prosthetic leg clunks hollowly against the rungs of the ladder as he leads them down, and Dream lets George go first. He thinks that they're just going down a few feet, but the ladder stretches down, down, down, until they pass into a lower level entirely and the city opens back up beneath them. Neon paints them in a pastel glow, and when Tommy finally reaches the walkway, George is wheezing softly as he joins him.

Dream isn't struggling at all, but he is curious. This is closer to Purgatory, and he'd always thought Wilbur stuck close to his home turf.

"Not much farther now," Tommy reassures them, trotting down the worn metal without so much as a glance at the street a hundred feet below them. George is a little more wary, but Dream is busy logging coordinates, pulling up a map of the parts of Deep Down he's memorized and adding to it. This is a new area for him.

The server asks if it can save a copy in its database, just for itself. He asks silently if it's going to provide it to the other admins and, when it hesitates a fraction too long, gently tells it no.

Five minutes later, they reach the apartment, slipping through an exterior door leading to a web of walkways that only residents seem to use. Once both of them are inside, Tommy locks the door behind them, then leads them to a room with a view over the city, its floor set a step down with comfortable furniture scattered about.

George flops into a beanbag with a heartfelt groan. After a moment of hesitation, Dream perches on the edge of the recessed floor, his back to the window so he can keep an eye on the rest of the room.

Tommy, Wilbur, and the one he thinks might be Niki. She's perched on the edge of a sofa with a cup of tea in her hands, Tommy joining her moments later, while Wilbur paces in short, jerky circles in front of a massive screen on the wall.

"We're here," George says once he's caught his breath, then sits up. "So talk."

Wilbur comes to a halt, watching them both with glittering eyes, then spins and gestures at the screen. Like it's a practiced move, the screen lights up with information, a pair of well-known faces flashing up across it. Dream catches his breath and stares.

"What," Wilbur asks, turning back to them with a queer smile, "do you know about the Antarctic Empire?"

"They're the de facto rulers of Elysium," George says with a frown. "They control the arms trade and the rare earth minerals trade, and they've held that spot for almost half a century. Rumor is that Philza Minecraft is immortal, but you can't really tell with Elysium types—they can afford the surgery and treatments to keep themselves looking young that no one else can. And he's a hybrid. Unmodded?"



A FREAK? flashes over Dream's mask, where George can't see it. Wilbur can, though, and he nods. "Unmodded. Elytrian hybrid, if you can fucking believe it. And whatever truth the rumors have, he and Technoblade *did* take over the city fifty years ago—just them. No one else. Leadership of the Empire hasn't ever changed hands, and they're not like the other conglomerates. No board."

"Holy shit," George says, and Dream whispers it under his breath.

He's heard the rumors too, obviously, but he's not from Elysium the way George is. It's different, hearing a rich kid parrot the same stuff that the dregs of society used to whisper in the night to scare the younger children. Better watch out, or the Blood God will grind your bones into paste for his dinner. Better keep on your toes, or the Angel of Death will bomb the streets out from under you.

"I mean, we were always told—" George cuts himself off before he can say anything else incriminating. Elysium brats don't get treated well in the Deep Down, and he's smart enough to know better than to antagonize L'manburg with his history of privilege. It doesn't matter that he turned his back on the family name and walked into Purgatory to live and work and die with his best friends; once a rich kid, always a rich kid.

"The problem is," Wilbur says, the screen flickering to a new display: graphs, data, and a map of the upper tiers of the city, "that if you want to get *anywhere* with the big corpos, you need to deal with the conglomerates. I have plans for Hypixel and Noxcrew, but I can't do anything until the Empire is in the dirt. Now, *normally* I'd target the board, but..."

"No board," Niki says, her voice surprisingly sweet. "And no one else to use against the Emperors. It doesn't matter how much dirt we dig up, because neither of them will budge, and as long as they rule the Empire, no one can change things."

"And *that* is where your team comes in." The wattage on Wilbur's smile turns up, the full force of his personality turned on George as he beams. Dream watches with interest as the tips of George's ears go red.

"You want us to kill Philza Minecraft?" he asks, disdainful even if Dream can see the way he wants to say yes. God, he can't wait to get back and tell Sapnap about this. It's going to be so funny to give him some ammo for once.

"No, because I doubt it would stick." Wilbur's smile turns mean and hateful. "No one's going to be able to reach him in Elysium, not in the heart of the city where the server is the strongest."

Something cold and awful pools in Dream's gut.

"What do you mean?" George asks, and both Tommy and Niki look confused. Like Wilbur hasn't shared his secret with them yet, waiting for a full audience before he reveals it like a hat trick.

"Philza is an admin. The server won't let anyone touch him." The words drop into the room like stones in gasoline, like a heavy pipe sinking into the pool of oil Dream found once on a

lower level. He'd watched as the pipe was sucked down, the oil too heavy and too clinging to be fought. Trying to rescue it would have been suicide.

That's what this feels like now, standing on the brink of something awful. Admins don't reveal themselves, don't share their identities, because being the city's most beloved means being a *threat*. Opening himself up to the server was the best and worst decision he's ever made in his life, because it paints a target on his back that will never go away. And Wilbur, with the cavalier spite that makes him so dangerous, has just set that information in front of them like a ticking time bomb.

Philza is a fucking admin. That explains a lot.

The blank smile on his mask doesn't even flicker. In the back of his mind, where the server always lurks, he hears the whisper, *I love you because you are love*.

"How do you know?" George's voice is disbelieving, and for good reason. The server might mark its favorites, but the only ones who can see the marks are other admins. It's the one protection it can give them.

"There's a video," Wilbur says, fiddling with an unlit cigarette as he starts to pace again. "I stumbled on it while I was looking for... incentive... and it shows the server reviving him. It *opened the goddamn floor up* to reach him, George, I've never seen it do that with anyone else. And he's not an operator."

Dream's fingers don't curl into fists, but his breathing is shallow now. He queries the server, is that true? And shyly, adoringly, it tells him yes.

"Shit. Okay. Then what's the plan here?" Even if he can't see the scowl on George's face, he can hear it. "We're killers, Wilbur, not corporate spies. Anything I could dig up with hacking, you could probably find eventually as well."

"I don't want you to kill Philza. But *Technoblade* on the other hand..." Wilbur trails off meaningfully as Tommy scoffs loudly.

"No fuckin' way, man," he says before George can hop in. "Philza might be immortal, but Technoblade is the *Blood God*. No one goes up against him and lives!"

BAD IDEA, Dream agrees, letting the words linger on his mask before flickering past an annoyed face and settling back on his usual smile.

"No, now, hear me out," Wilbur hastens to add, cigarette dancing as he lifts his hands in a conciliatory gesture, "I *know* it's hard, maybe even seems impossible. But he's just a man, with access to some wonderful medical care, not an immortal admin. He can be killed. And if he's killed, then Philza will be so fucked up—I mean, the two are practically married—that he'll let the Empire start to slide. *That* is when we strike."

"Hang on, hang on," George says, leaning forward as he pinches the space between his brows, just past the edge of his goggles. "You want us to kill the *unkillable* Blood God,

because you think it will emotionally destabilize the immortal Angel of Death, which will let you take over the Antarctic Empire without getting your hands dirty?”

“Oh no, my hands will be *very* dirty once I’m done ripping the Empire to shreds,” Wilbur says, relaxing back into his usual smug posturing. “But I can’t get to that point as long as the two of them stand strong. Since Philza’s a nonviable target, I figured your team would be better served getting the other one.”

“What makes you think that we can pull it off?” George looks up, and Dream—

He hesitates.

This is a big job. Possibly the biggest job they’ll ever take. Everything they’ve done before, it’s only ever targeted power players in the Deep Down, or the occasional corpo bigwig stupid enough to come close enough for them to grasp. He’s never even *been* past the lowest level of Midgard, not when the risk is too high and there’s no profit in it. And now here Wilbur is, offering him an adrenaline rush and the chance to put his name out there as not just a team of assassins, but as *the* team of assassins.

If they can pull it off, it’ll be the score of a lifetime. If he can manage it, his name will be as immortalized as Philza, as Technoblade, as the giants who reshaped the face of the city decades ago and never released it from their grasp.

“Aren’t you the best there is?” Wilbur asks, sly and knowing. He’s set the bait and he’s already anticipating reeling them in, the bastard.

“Ask him about compensation,” Dream orders, his voice never traveling further than the confines of his mask.

George pauses, not looking back over his shoulder, but Dream can tell he wants to. Then he says, “How much are we talking for this?”

“Stakes in the future L’manburg conglomerate?” Wilbur offers, before laughing. “No, no, of course not. I can be reasonable. Five hundred thousand, pure credits, or I can do half in diamonds if you prefer that.”

Now everyone pauses, turning to stare at him in disbelief. When the *fuck* had L’manburg come into that sort of money?

“Half of it upfront,” George says as soon as he recovers. Shock can’t hold a candle to good business sense, and George is pragmatic about being paid. “That kind of money, I want a proper down payment on.”

“Of course, of course,” Wilbur agrees blithely, waving his hand in a dismissive gesture before pulling a lighter from his pocket. “I can have it transferred the moment you agree.”

George looks back at him, and everyone else does too. He might be the money guy, the hacker, the one that everyone contacts to hire them, but they know who the real leader of the

Dream Team is. Dream thinks about it for only a few seconds more, then silently promises, WE'LL DO IT.

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“You are *insane*,” Sapnap tells him the moment they get back and pass on everything Wilbur sent. He’s helpfully provided a data drive with all of his information on the Antarctic Empire, including schematics for the compound—palace—it’s based out of, and the damning video of Philza Minecraft being saved by the server. It’s useful information, but it’s not nearly enough, and if they’re going to do this, they’re going to do this right.

That means a long couple of nights of research ahead of them. Dream tries not to feel too miserable over that.

“You’re actually crazy,” Sapnap continues when neither of them respond, George booting up the heavy rig he has wired into the wall while Dream pulls down the thin screens he uses when he doesn’t want to interface with the server directly. “Like, can we stop and think about this for a second? How stupid and crazy this is?”

“Heard you the first time, Sapnap,” he mutters, biting his lip as the server starts pouring information about Elysium onto his screens. George can’t go, not as recognizable as he is Topside, and Sapnap can’t go because he doesn’t have an identification chip. He’d be pegged as soon as he stepped into Midgard, much less before he made his way to the upper levels of the city where Elysium sits.

Dream doesn’t have an identification chip either, but the server wouldn’t rat him out.

“No, hang on, I think we need to go over it again, because you are going to try and kill *Technoblade*, the *Blood God*, because Wilbur wants to start a pissing contest with the Angel of Death? That Wilbur? The one that blew up a giant chunk of Hell and made it uninhabitable?”

“The credits just cleared,” George announces from the other side of the room and Sapnap makes an incoherent noise of rage.

“You cannot be serious! Dream!”

“Have you ever seen the sky, Sapnap?” he asks, running his fingers along the edge of one screen. Underneath them, the server hums, and it almost feels like his palms tingle.

George stays quiet. Eventually, Sapnap has to admit, “...No. Never. Not—not outside of vids and shit.”

“Yeah,” Dream breathes, staring hungrily at the map showing him where the compound opens up to air and nothing else. He knew that the Empire was rich, but it isn’t until now that he realizes *how* rich. “Me neither. When am I ever going to get a chance like this again?”

“You’re so fucking stupid,” Sapnap mutters, but he stomps over to his own setup and starts booting the computer up. “Fine. I’ll help, but I’m protesting the entire time, and if you die, I’m going up there to piss on your grave.”

“Hot,” Dream says flatly.

“He’d like it,” George says at the same time.

“I hate you both,” Sapnap groans, and then they all get down to work.

The problem, Dream decides after two days of research and arguing over what to order for takeout, is twofold. The first problem, the biggest problem, is the *how* in killing Technoblade; he’s modded, one of the first to accept cybernetic implants in his head apparently, and on top of that, he’s a piglin hybrid. They’re sturdy creatures, there’s a reason why piglin is popular for gene therapy, and coming at it naturally means there’s no underlying biological triggers to exploit. Someone with the right wiring can get Sapnap to blow his own arms off with a blaze powder overload, but natural hybrids don’t have that issue. So he’s built like a truck, trained to kill and one of the best at it, and, to top it all off, he’s got a natural healing factor that leaves even near fatal wounds as just scars on his pale, pink-tinted skin.

There’s a video of someone dropping a safe on him, the weight of it cracking his skull and the pavement in equal measure. Technoblade recovered from it. The ground did not.

The second problem, which is the problem Dream finds himself much more concerned with, is how to get up to Elysium in the first place. His work clothes won’t do, because what goes unremarked upon in Purgatory will stand out like a sore thumb in Elysium. He can pass, barely, in Midgard if he throws on a jacket and makes his mask as unassuming as possible. But Elysium favors beauty above all else, expects any enhancements to look as natural and clean as possible, scorns anyone who doesn’t match their absurd demands for perfection.

“We can always return the money,” George offers, when Dream leans back in his chair and stares at crowd shots of the Elysium commons for anyone, *anyone* who looks like him in his mask. “If we can’t do the job—”

“We can do the job,” Dream cuts him off, lips pulling in a scowl. It’s just—

He doesn’t like having his self, his truest, ugliest self, on display. He hides his voice, hides his face, hides his name with the same paranoia that drives him to pull the collar of his bodysuit over the invisible admin mark on the back of his neck. No one but George and Sapnap know what he looks like, because his first mask was a cracked piece of recycled plastic but it was still *there*, tied to his face from the moment Dream learned to make a knot.

If he goes up to Elysium, it means going up barefaced for the first time in his life. And he’s struggling with that. It’s a demand for him to be vulnerable in a way he’s never had to be

before, and all for what? A suicidal mission to kill a man who might as well be a god? Just to see the sky, something that probably doesn't even exist?

Without saying anything else, he shoves himself up out of his seat and stomps back to the bathroom. There's a mirror above the sink, the only truly reflective surface in their apartment, and he turns the lights on with a thought before staring at himself in it. Most of the time, he goes from shower to door without so much as a glance towards it. Sapnap and George have a better idea of what he looks like than he does.

Limp blonde hair, he thinks critically, cut short enough that it fits under his mask without issue but not so short that the shape of his skull is on display. Pale skin, unmarred by scarring except at the edges of his arm prosthetics, where the bases have been fused into his flesh. Slight gap in his teeth, never worth fixing, and eyes that glow green from the mods that scroll feeds across his retinas. It's a little bit lean, a little bit feral looking, but he can force his expression into something tame for a short period of time.

It's... a face. He scowls at his reflection, watching the way it pulls at his lips and wrinkles his nose, then sticks his tongue out for good measure. "You're an ugly fuck," he tells himself, before grinning at the way his eye twitches at the words, "you stupid looking asshole."

"Are you gonna be in here negging yourself all day, or can I pee?" Sapnap asks from the doorway.

He jerks back, tearing his gaze off the face he quietly loathes, then scrubs his fingers through his hair a few times. Maybe he should shave the sides. Is that something they do, up in Elysium?

"Yeah, let me get outta your way," he mutters, shifting to the side as he goes to pass. Sapnap grabs his wrist before he can, pulling him back and wrapping an arm around his shoulders. He's a few inches shorter and blaze warm, the muscle in his chest firm against the wiry shape of Dream's own frame.

"You look fine," Sapnap says, hugging him tight. "Seriously. You're a hottie."

"Shut the fuck up, Sapnap." Dream lets himself hug back though, tucking his face into Sapnap's shoulder as he presses close. All three of them might cuddle when they fall into bed together, but proper hugs are a rare treat.

They stand there for a long moment, quiet and pensive, then Sapnap says, "You don't have to do this, man. Not if it means showing your face."

"I'm doing this." He squeezes Sapnap tighter, careful to keep within the range of normal human strength. "I want to do this. I just—I'm just going to need a moment."

"Are you going to ask Sam for a different set of arms?" Sapnap's fingers trail over the black matte metal of his current ones, dipping into the wiring at his wrist and elbow briefly. Just enough to make Dream shiver at the feedback, the only real sense of touch he can get in them anymore.

He really doesn't want to. These arms are perfect, some of Sam's best work yet, and if he asks for another set he might have to tell him why. But... Dream breathes out, groaning into Sapnap's shirt, then finally starts to pull away. "Yeah. Yeah, I should go do that now, actually."

But before he can leave, Sapnap grabs him again, tugging his face down until their foreheads can knock together. His dark eyes are intent, locked on Dream's, and his voice is serious when he says, "We love you, Dream. Make sure you come back alive, okay?"

He smiles, involuntary and fond, and says, "I always do."

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He's been to Midgard before, but never like this.

Every other time, enforcers have converged on him within minutes. He evaded them, of course, climbing up into the vents and racing across the walkways they don't normally use before making his way to one of the safe locations he knows of. But this time, he gets glances and the pass of a datapad, scanning for an identification chip that doesn't exist, and then they leave him alone. The server lies for him, and his unmasked face does the rest.

As he moves through the crowd, he keeps his hood up, taking advantage of its limited ability to hide his face. The jacket is a vibrant green, his favorite shade, and it's something he wears occasionally when going out to the market but not so often that it'll be associated with his masked identity. The white crop top and harem pants are so far divergent from his usual black outfits that he's not even worried about being recognized in them.

Midgard is cleaner than Deep Down, and the server is present here. Everyone is chipped, screens built into the signage and the walls of the buildings around him to display information for those without eyes like his. He taps into the local feeds, letting the information flow across his vision as he looks around, experiencing the city like this for the first time.

This close to the travel hub, there's food stalls, so he pauses long enough to buy a kebab, then heads for the elevators up.

"You have four levels you need to ascend through before you reach Elysium," George says in his ear, the server running a voice channel right into his skull even without an earpiece. He can't reply beyond text, but that's good enough for now. "You shouldn't run into any issues on the next two levels, but the upper layer of Midgard can get dicey. Tell me when you're there, and I'll guide you."

Dream hums softly, then steps into a lift when it's his turn, waving his wrist over the payment screen and telling the server to lie for him.

He's not used to these prosthetics. They're as sturdy as Sam could make them, but the exterior is a gleaming white plastic, the joints lined with black rubber to protect their sensitive insides. There's not as much give in the fingers and the range of motion is worse, because the need to fit in meant Sam was copying some of the designs of the boutique

mechanics based out of Midgard. Up in Elysium, synth skin is the norm, but Dream doesn't know what he'd do if he had to look down at human flesh tones on his palms.

With a flick of his wrist, he flings the skewer into a recycling bin, then starts making his slow way across the city to the next level. Deep Down is a warren, but Midgard is laid out in clean lines, carefully geometric in design; he can see where some of it translates below, and he can also map out which power stations and water purification plants feed into specific neighborhoods. The one he's walking through right now has most of its utilities based in Limbo, and the thought is amusing.

The novelty of traveling through Midgard wears thin eventually. It's too bright up here, clean fluorescent lights and glittering screens without any missing pixels. He misses the darkness of the Deep Down, the buzz of neon and xenon, the rainbow glow of LEDs tucked under the heavy shadows of pipes and vents. There's no exposed wiring, no holes in the walls for a canny killer to sneak into, and entirely too many people walking comfortably on the streets around here. He looks up at the utility walkways, used only by workers, and longs to climb up to someplace he can breathe.

The server notifies George once he gets close to Elysium, and his best friend's voice filters back into his ears as he directs Dream down certain streets, up a specific set of stairs, down a little-used alley to an elevator in good repair but tucked out of the way.

"This will spit you out about a quarter of a mile away from the Empire's gates," George says, fingers rattling across his keyboard. "There's a park near there, or there used to be, and we can do some recon from that point. Have we figured out our plan of attack yet?"

Dream tells the server to let George know that winging it is still his only plan, with falling back to the safety of Purgatory a reluctant close second. There's only so much they can learn from documents and video, so if this mission is recon only, that's still a good use of his time.

His first sight of Elysium is white walls, buildings with gilding and glass reaching up far above him. The pathways are scrubbed until they're nearly gleaming, like something other than metal had gone into making them, and if it wouldn't make him stand out, he'd drop to a crouch to inspect them. This close to the server's main hub, the AI is crooning sweet nothings in his ears, drowning out George if he's bothering to talk.

There's green showing up as he gets away from the elevator and heads for the park. Dream puzzles over it at first, trying to figure out why someone would go through all the effort of tacking up fake plants—and then it hits him, that these are *real plants*, real trees and real ivy and real grass just... growing up here. He can't hear the thrum of the fans recycling air and circulating it because they don't need that up in Elysium, they have plants and open air and—

He gets to the park, out from under the shadow of the buildings, and looks up. And up. And up.

Once, when he was younger, he stumbled on a hole in the Nether. The locals called it the Void and said that they dropped unwanted items down it. It was pitch black and when he dropped a glowstick down, the shape of it vanished long before it ever hit the ground. If it ever hit the ground. Maybe it's falling still.



The sky is like that, blue and endless, so deep that he feels like he might fall into it at any moment. His feet are rooted to the ground, a formless, nameless fear welling up in him, because if he takes a step, if he loses his grip, he's just going to fall up and never stop falling, like that glowstick into darkness that never ends.

Then George says, "What are you staring at, weirdo?" and the spell is broken, and suddenly he's not close *enough*.

He doesn't care if it's out of character for an Elysium resident, if he looks out of place and out of touch. Dream finds the closest object that isn't alive, too fearful of hurting a tree to climb it, then scrambles up the exterior of a fountain so he can perch right at the top. The seat of his pants goes damp within seconds, but he can't stop looking up, can't keep himself from reaching one white plastic hand into the air like if he stretches far enough, he'll touch the panels that must be showing him this vision. Because it has to be fake, right? There's no way that something this beautiful is *real*.

Distantly, he can hear George talking—berating him—and the server's excitement at what he's seeing, but he can't process either right now. The feeds on his retinas are empty, no local IRCs or location data blocking the view. There's a single white cloud, and he watches it slowly drift across the expanse of blue, his fingers tracing the shape of it as it moves at a rate the server informs him is much faster than he thinks. It's so far away that he can't tell.

Nothing can break through his wonder at the sight, until he hears a low voice drawl, "You're not from around here, are you?"

Dream's attention snaps down, something familiar enough in the voice that he can't stop himself. Sure enough, that's the fucking Blood God standing there, looking up at him, his mane of pink hair pulled back into a braid and a smile tucked up around his tusks. A crown sits on the top of his head, fancy Elysium clothes modeled after old world royalty covering the rest of him, and it would be anachronistic if Dream didn't know that half of Elysium dresses like that.

"What, people up here don't look at the sky that often?" he asks, defensive and embarrassed. His pants are completely soaked through, the white fabric clinging to his thighs, and he's extremely grateful that they're at least thick enough not to show anything incriminating.

"Well, we don't climb on fountains to do it," Technoblade tells him, smile widening. That piglin heritage makes him built as fuck, thick muscle across his chest and shoulders, biceps bulging and forearms corded with it where they're folded in front of him. Dream can't get an accurate read on his height, not from up here, but the dossier claims that Technoblade is a little over eight inches taller than him, which makes him a solid foot taller than the other Emperor.

"Maybe you should try it some time," Dream says, pulling his feet up under himself and standing. He sees the moment Technoblade realizes what he's going to do, the slight alarm that pushes the hybrid forward, but it's too late.

Dream jumps, hits the ground, rolls, then springs up and marvels at the way soil and grass cushion his fall in a way metal never could. The server is ecstatic, pinging him repeatedly

with updates about the crush of grass under his palms—the smell of it in the air—the content of the dirt under his shoes—asking does he love it? Does he love the thing that the AI has cultivated here?

Technoblade is less pleased.

“What the heck,” he says, dropping the arms that he’d lifted in a useless attempt to catch Dream. “That’s at *least* thirty feet, you could’ve broken your neck!”

“It’s not *that* far.” Dream rolls his eyes, then looks up and reassesses. Maybe... maybe it *was* that high up, in retrospect. Maybe his difficulty making out some of Technoblade’s features had more to do with distance and less to do with him blinding himself on that endless blue.

His eyes are much redder in person, Dream realizes, and he can see the tell-tale ring of light around the iris that the older models of vision implants have. There’s a scruff of facial hair that he missed from above, and now that he’s not looking down at him, he can see the metal guards that take the place of shoes, Technoblade’s heavy hooves able to dig into the soft ground with ease. Most people with piglin mods don’t take it that far, but maybe that’s the difference between a true hybrid and a crafted one.

“You—okay. Okay.” Technoblade sighs, looking him up and down, and suddenly, Dream knows exactly how he’s going to kill him. “Look, what’s your name?”

“Dream,” he admits easily, because his team might be notorious in the Deep Down but there’s no way for Techno to connect that with the man standing in front of him. “Come on, admit it, that was cool. I’m cool.”

“You are not cool,” Technoblade says, even if his eyes are lingering on the toned muscle of Dream’s stomach. “That was, uh, pretty uncool, if I do say so myself. Super lame even.”

“Oh yeah?” He steps forward, until he’s in the Blood God’s space, head tipped up to look him dead in the eyes. The feed in the corner of his vision scrolls, telling him about the way Technoblade’s heartbeat kicks up, George’s voice muted while Dream stares into an expanse of glowing red and feels the adrenaline hit. “I’d love to see you do better.”

Technoblade’s eyes widen, his lips parting slightly as he shifts his weight like he’s readying for a fight. Dream won’t take him on, not one to one like this, but he can’t deny the thrill at the idea of facing him down someday. “That a challenge, Dream?”

“Name a time and place,” Dream tells him, grinning as his heart pounds. Take the bait, he thinks, watching Technoblade’s respiration, his heartbeat, his pupils. Take the bait I’m putting in front of you.

“Need your comm key for that,” Technoblade says, and the taste of victory is sweeter than any candy on Dream’s tongue.

He rattles off the key, accepts the request the moment Technoblade sends it, then laughs when the time and place is set for tomorrow evening. Not at the palace, but at an arena nearby, the kind where battlegrounds can be rented and nonlethal fights played out. Only Topside has

arenas like that, the sort where digital weapons and digital wounds replace the blood and sweat and guts of real combat; Dream learned everything he knows from Deep Down, and it's made him stronger than the pampered pets up here.

But they say Technoblade came from the Nether once, and they call him the Blood God. He can't fucking wait to fight him.

"What do I get if I win?" he asks, checking his comm even though he can see all the information on his retinas. "Other than clout for beating *the* Technoblade, obviously."

"You're awfully confident for a man wearing wet pants," Technoblade drawls, but he can't quite hide the excitement in his voice either. "Maybe I'll let you pick a prize *if* you win, or..."

"Or?" Dream asks, shoving the comm back in his jacket pocket and ignoring the chill starting to raise goosebumps on his legs. He doesn't miss the way Technoblade's eyes drag over him again, or the bob of his throat as he swallows.

"Or maybe I give you the same prize you'd get for losing," he says, and Dream doesn't bother to hide the shiver that rolls through him.

They don't talk much more after that. He leaves the park with one last longing look at the sky, then asks the server to find him someplace to hole up in Midgard until the duel tomorrow. It had taken him almost five hours to make it up here from Purgatory, and he's not going to waste that time going back home just to sleep for a few hours and do the whole thing over again. Midgard isn't Deep Down, but there's plenty of places for a man without a chip to hide, especially if he's an admin.

"—op *ignoring* me Dream, I swear I will go up there and find you—" George's voice finally flickers back into his hearing again as the server flings coordinates at him, a restaurant for him to get food from and an empty apartment he can sleep in for the night.

*Relax*, Dream tells him through text, trusting the server to make sure his words are seen. *I have an in, and I'm going to take him down tomorrow after we duel.*

"A d—why the *hell* are you dueling him, Dream?!" George's voice raises in pitch, and Sapnap's voice joins it faintly in the background. "Are you even coming home tonight?"

He can't risk it, which the server relays, and then it gives George a truncated version of events. As it works on that, Dream takes the lift down, hops off it before it reaches the floor of Midgard's top level, finding himself on a maintenance walkway, and starts heading for food. He already misses the endless void of the sky, that dizzying sense of openness.

After the server finishes giving his team an update, George huffs very softly and says, "I hope you know what you're doing, Dream. He's not stupid."

Which is why Dream isn't going to kill him during the duel and didn't even try to draw his blade at the park. He'll get a measure of how good Technoblade is in a fight, get some of that adrenaline out of his system, and then he'll take the Blood God down when he's at his most

vulnerable. Not in front of a crowd, or someplace where he'll be wary and on guard, but someplace no one else is watching. Someplace where only Philza will find him.

Dream grins, palm flat against a wall and the server arching up under his touch like a cat, and thinks about how easy it will be to kill Technoblade in his sleep.

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The sky isn't blue this time. Dream stops, somewhere out of the way, and looks up past the buildings that cut into it, eyes narrowed as he examines the roiling mass of gray above him. The server tells him about rain, about windspeed and humidity, calculates the likelihood that water will come crashing down out of the sky on him. That sounds fake, because the only time something like that has ever happened is when one of the municipal water pipes burst over Purgatory, drowning almost two hundred people when the gates between streets locked automatically to contain the flood.

He'd been on a mission with his crew when it happened, one of their first, before they'd really made a name for themselves. It had saved their lives, even if it meant their home at the time smelled of mildew and copper for months afterwards.

If he lingers any longer, he'll be late. With a shake of his head, he carries on to the arena, lifting his wrist to the pay kiosk as he passes through the doors. He's never seen the interior of one of these before, and he has a moment of confusion when trying to figure out which direction to go, the signage vague and the roar of a crowd making him hesitate.

A heavy hand lands on his shoulder and he looks up into red eyes and a smug, triumphant little grin.

"C'mon," Technoblade says, "I got us a private arena."

"You just don't want anyone to see me kick your ass," Dream tells him as he falls into step, relieved to have some guidance. The server can only help him so much, and George can help him even less; up here in Elysium, he feels off balance and out of touch.

"I'm thinkin' of your feelings here, not mine. The crowd might give you performance anxiety, and then where will we be?" Technoblade opens a door for him, waving him through into a small staging area. The rules of the arena are displayed on the screen, information about legal hits—anything with the digital weaponry, nothing with physical hands and feet—and the rules for tiebreaking.

When he rests a palm against the contestant registry panel, his name flickers across it, the server helpfully uploading a doctored photo that would normally be tied to an identification

strip. A series of hearts flickers over his eyes, and he blinks as he realizes that it's supposed to be his hit meter.

"Wow, this is fake as hell," he says without thinking, scrolling through weapon options. "You can *color code* them?"

Beside him, Technoblade laughs, a sharp bark of amusement, and selects his own options. Red, because the guy has a fetish for it, a sword, a crossbow. Dream usually uses a sword when he's hunting but—

He picks the axe, and a shield, and a rod with a line on it that he puzzles over before choosing it just for the novelty. Green, because he might as well match his jacket and white isn't an option. He reviews the rules again, wonders if certain strikes will deal more damage, wonders what the consequences will be if he breaks them. A loss, sure, but if he *did* try to kill Technoblade right here, could anyone stop him? There's a knife tucked into the white plastic of his arm. He could do it now.

"For some reason, they frown upon real bloodshed up here," Technoblade says dryly as the door to the small private sparring area opens up. Dream follows him out, looking down at the sand under his shoes, then examines the rest of the environment. Tall columns that can be hidden behind or used to kick off of, walls that stretch twenty feet up to empty stands. He tips his head back, heading for where a line is marked out in the sand, and turns in a slow circle before finally focusing on Technoblade again.

The man waits for him with remarkable patience, sword in one hand, crossbow at his hip. Both flicker as the hologram refreshes, and Dream watches his own weapons do the same.

"The sign said best out of ten?" he asks, just to confirm. The match points sit at the top right of his vision, his hit points at the bottom left.

"First to six wins," Technoblade agrees, his smug smile stretching into something meaner.

A timer flickers into view and then Technoblade is moving, shifting to put one of the columns between himself and Dream, and Dream finds himself giving chase. The sand is nothing like metal under his shoes, but he adjusts to the feeling quickly, bounding to one of the walls to kick off and see what Technoblade is doing.

Waiting for him, apparently. His axe meets the blade of Technoblade's sword, the handle vibrating under his palm in manufactured feedback as Technoblade breaks away before swinging the sword at his head. He's too slow to jerk away, but there's no pain as the digital blade sweeps over his skin, just a readout that shows his hit points reducing. He's startled enough by the difference that the next strike finds his heart, and then the system pings them both to settle back at their starting positions for the next round.

"What the absolute fuck," Dream says, freezing in place as his hands tingle and the server croons reassurances to him.

"First time is always a freebie," Technoblade tells him, not without sympathy, before clapping him on the back and pushing him to the other side of the arena. "C'mon, show me

you have some bite for that bark.”

He’s... being condescended to. Dream knows he’s got a terrible temper, knows he has a tendency to lash out too quickly and without thinking, but holy shit, he hates it when people talk down to him. Always has. Even back when he was a stupid little kid, one arm missing and the other crushed to uselessness, he was more than capable of holding his own in a fight.

The timer flicks on. Technoblade goes on the defensive again, sword held up in a guard position as he nocks a bolt into his fake crossbow with his free hand. Dream lunges forward, flicking his axe into a low striking motion, and when Technoblade moves to deflect him, he switches on a dime, twisting his body around to slam the fake shield into Technoblade’s face instead.

With a startled noise, Technoblade takes a step back, thrusting his sword forward. He snakes around it, sweeping the axe through Technoblade’s arm, then his leg, then an ankle. Disabling blows, even if he’s pretty sure the point count is lower for those in the scoring system.

It doesn’t matter, in the end. The system pings them both as he freezes midswing, and Technoblade stares at him with wide eyes and a faint flush on his pink skin.

“Is the second time a freebie too?” Dream asks, baring his teeth in something that isn’t quite a smile.

“Not usually,” Technoblade tells him, before jerking his chin towards the starting mark. After a second longer, just relishing the sight of a blade, even a digital one, at the Blood God’s throat, Dream steps back and takes his position again.

He’s starting to get the hang of it now. The handle doesn’t have the weight of a real weapon and the footing is treacherous, but he thinks he gets the idea. And this time, when the round starts, Technoblade is watching him with wary eyes, like an opponent he respects.

They trade victories, one after the other. Technoblade takes advantage of the fighting system; Dream figures out how to use his rod to tangle his feet up. Technoblade finally pulls the crossbow out, and Dream learns the best way to use the shield to block blows. What *should* be his fourth victory is a fuckup, a fluke, and Techno sweeps that one out from under him, but he makes it up close to the end, draws them even as they move into the tenth round, and when the system informs him that he’s lost, he’s not angry anymore. He’s too busy laughing, even past the sting of defeat, too busy shaking with energy and triumph because he went ten rounds with the Blood God and he very nearly *won*.

Technoblade isn’t laughing when he drops the toys they’ve been using to fight with and grabs his face to kiss him. His tusks are sharp against Dream’s lips, his grip bruising on Dream’s jaw, and despite both those facts, Dream opens his mouth into the kiss with a gasp.

He’s not inexperienced, but he’s never been kissed by someone like Technoblade before, all power and heat as he’s crushed into the other man’s chest. When his plastic fingers fist in the delicate fabric of Technoblade’s shirt and the threads creak under his grip, he feels Technoblade growl, blunt fingernails scraping over his scalp as one massive hand curls around the back of his head. He sinks his own teeth into Technoblade’s lower lip, tugging at it

as another growl vibrates through him, and then he's yanked away, eyes wide and skin flushed, Technoblade's face little better.

"What's my prize for losing?" Dream asks as he swallows, his hands still curled in Technoblade's shirt.

"This way," Technoblade growls, letting him go before grabbing one of Dream's hands. The plastic creaks under his grip, piglin strength too much for even the reinforcement Sam can build in. Dream's fingers twitch and he reminds himself that this is a mission, that he's on a mission, that Technoblade is going to be dead as soon as they're done.

But, he thinks as they pass through the staging room, out the front door, down the street to the palace, that doesn't mean he can't have some fun first.

The Antarctic Empire has some of the strongest security in the city, their palace more tightly patrolled than any other compound in Elysium. When he'd started planning this hit with George and Sapnap, they had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to breach. Even with the server on his side—and he couldn't expect complete cooperation where Philza was involved—there are so many fail safes and additional guards that even a man working alone can't slip past them all.

With his hand held tight in Technoblade's, Dream bypasses every single one. He doesn't get a chance to spot much of the floorplan, only seeing glimpses of lobbies—hallways—rooms for business—and then they're moving into what he privately thinks of as the family wing, past massive gilded doors and startled guards. He can see a courtyard through massive windows, the barest slice of gray sky above the brilliant green of the plants there, and his eyes widen at the sight before he's dragged through another door and it's slammed shut behind him.

"I got a rule," Technoblade says, breathing hard as he pins Dream back against the door. His arms cage Dream's head in, his body a heavy weight that keeps him from running, and the glow around his eyes turns them red like freshly spilled blood. "About the people I'm willin' to take to bed, the people worth my time."

"Yeah?" Dream breathes, wishing he could feel the warmth of Technoblade's muscles under his palms, settling for it against his front. His legs are trembling, a liquid heat building low in his gut as it curls around his spine.

"If you can best me in a fight, you're worth my time." Technoblade's hand slides under the jacket, settles hot against the bare skin on his stomach, and one thigh jams between Dream's as he makes a soft, choked noise at the touch. "There's only been two people able to pass that bar, and you're one of 'em."

"Maybe—Maybe your standards are too h—" He cuts himself off with a sharp gasp as Techno's hand slides into his pants, squeezing his ass. His hips snap forward, and then again, and then he's rocking against the hard muscle between his legs as Technoblade bends in close enough to capture his mouth again.

Tusks scrape against his lips as Technoblade's tongue drives into his mouth, and Dream has one hand fisted in the back of Technoblade's shirt, the other tugging at the belt loops on his

stupid embroidered pants. He's burning up like one of the fire pits in the Nether, like one of the foundries that paints that section of the city in the sullen red of molten metal, and he's going to go insane if Technoblade doesn't do something more than just fondle him here. The mission is secondary. *Getting off* is his new primary goal.

"Limits?" Technoblade asks against his mouth, the words muffled between the cage of their lips as Dream whimpers into the pressure grinding up against him.

"What?" He breaks off, grabs Technoblade's braid without thinking to tug him away and sees his eyes brighten at the pull. "What do you—What?"

"Things I shouldn't do, places you don't want me to touch," Technoblade clarifies, squeezing Dream's ass again for good measure. "Otherwise I'll just do what I want and bring you along for the ride."

"Don't touch the back of my neck," Dream says automatically, an instinctive response that he wishes he could take back an instant later. "And I'd rather not get fucked in the ass if it's all the same to you."

"That all?" Technoblade hunts his expression for any indication that there's more but—yeah, no, Dream can't think of anything. He's willing to try most stuff at least once, and he's already planning on killing the man—doing it a little sooner won't fuck up anything.

"That's it," he confirms, before making a startled noise when Technoblade shifts his grip and falls to his knees. Even then, he's a massive man, his mouth level with Dream's stomach and his lips tracing the muscle there. "Do you—uh, you have—"

"Don't yank my hair, a little tugging is fine, and no pet names." Technoblade looks up at him with a wicked grin, then undoes the belt keeping Dream's pants up. Without it, they fall down around his thighs in an instant, and he's not wearing any underwear underneath them.

"Someone was anticipating gettin' lucky."

"You *implied*," Dream says, grabbing Techno's shoulder instead of his hair, spreading his legs a little wider as the cool air against him makes him tremble. Still meeting his eyes, Techno sinks lower, trailing lips and tongue over the lean muscle until he hits the tangle of hair and the cockhead pushing up from underneath it.

The first drag of a tongue over Dream makes his hips snap forward, a high noise of pleasure spilling from his lips. His fingers tighten in Technoblade's shirt, head tipping back as wet heat drags over him again and again and *again*, until the only thing he can focus on is the slurping of Technoblade's tongue and the frantic clench of his hole around nothing.

"Gh—fucking—c'mon—" he pants, rocking hard against the tongue still teasing at him, not daring to grab Technoblade's head and hold it in place. He can't trust the strength in his artificial fingers, not now, and he doesn't want to get kicked out of the bedroom before he comes—completes the mission. Has to complete the mission.

Technoblade flattens his tongue across his cock, wraps his lips around it, then sucks. With another desperate noise, his back arches up off the door, fingers digging in until fabric rips



underneath them, thighs trembling. God, fuck, *shit*, he's never had someone lavish this kind of attention on him, and when Technoblade pulls off him and nudges his face fully between Dream's legs, he keens at the feel of that tongue pushing up into his cunt.

"Fffu-hah-fucking—" He rolls his hips, chokes on his own tongue as Technoblade's drives into him, shakes with frantic pleasure as heat rolls through him with every stroke. It's like someone's wrapped twine around his insides, tied all his organs up and then knotted them to his cunt, and when Technoblade fucks into the already wet hole with his even wetter tongue, the knots tighten.

His pants slide lower, pooling around his ankles and then the floor as Technoblade nudges him into hooking one leg over his shoulder. It gives him much better access, sending Dream's head snapping back as his hips jerk forward, and he loosens one hand from the ruin of Technoblade's shirt. Reaches with shaking fingers to touch himself, even if cool plastic isn't as good as warm flesh, because he's going to die if he doesn't come soon.

Technoblade knocks his hands away, pushes one of his own up under Dream's thigh to keep him steady while the other settles against his stomach with his thumb against Dream's cock. He has sword calluses, real calluses, which leave the pads of his fingers rough, and when it rocks against him, Dream moans so loudly he's sure everyone can hear him.

"I'm gonna—" he gasps, rocking into Technoblade's mouth with increasingly frantic motions. The knots around his organs *hurt*, an ache that spreads through him until the only relief he can think of is something buried deep inside him. Technoblade's tongue, his fingers, or oh god, his *cock*—

Tusks scrape against the soft skin of his inner thighs, a nail presses just hard enough against his cock, and then Technoblade's tongue delves deeper into him than it ever has before. He writhes, chokes out one last warning, hips snapping forward as Technoblade takes a knife of pure pleasure to the twine around his insides and he comes harder than he ever has in his *life*. He honest to god sees white, ears ringing as his voice cracks and his hole spasms desperately around the tongue still fucking up into it.

Dream makes a muted noise of protest when Technoblade pulls his tongue free and drags it back over his cock again, his body oversensitive to the point of pain. Then he gasps much louder when Techno hefts him up, lifting and turning so he can dump Dream on the massive mattress sitting only a few feet away. The covers are soft and plush, filled with feathers, and the sheets underneath them made of a cotton so delicate it could be skin.

"H-hang on—" he starts to stammer, before gasping when Technoblade pushes two fingers up into him, thrusting them into his hole as Dream clenches around them. His fingers are *big*, two of them fitting into him in a way that would take all four of Dream's. He's done that before, jammed all of his fingers into his own cunt, riding his hand desperately while chasing sweet relief, and this is so much better.

The drag of Technoblade's calluses on his insides is like a whetstone to his guts, the wet sound of them plunging in and out just background noise to Technoblade's voice when he says, "Damn, you want it bad. Have you been thinkin' about me fucking you, Dream?"

“Shut the—shut the fuck up,” he gasps, twisting his hands in the covers as his hips snap up. The heat of a palm over his cunt, Technoblade’s thumb rocking against his still too sensitive cock, makes him keen, and he feels himself clench around the firm digits even as he writhes like he’s trying to get away. It’s impossible for him to really tell anymore.

“Look at you,” Technoblade rumbles, bending over him as he thrusts a third finger in to the sharp sound of Dream’s keening. “You’re a mess, and I haven’t even stuffed you with my cock yet. Gonna cry when I do, pretty boy?”

“D-don’t—” *look* is what he means to say, but Technoblade fucks all three of his fingers into him as his thumb presses down *hard* and Dream is sobbing wordlessly instead, rocking into the pressure as hard as he can. Fuck but he’s never felt so *full*, and the casual way Technoblade manhandles him sets his skin on fire. He’s already on the edge again, each jolt of knuckles against his folds making him jerk his hips up, and the tears that spill over and run down his cheeks are almost as humiliating as the curl of Technoblade’s voice calling him *pretty*.

The wave of pleasure *hurts* when it hits, his nerves jangled up as his spine arches and he wails from the feeling of Technoblade’s fingers in his cunt.

His breath comes in sputters and jerks, catching deep in his chest as Dream hiccups and tries to get himself under control. When Technoblade pulls his fingers out, he can’t stop the instinctive clench or the whine that crawls out of his throat from feeling so goddamn empty. He’s never—he’s never come that hard in his *life*, much less twice.

There’s the distinctive sound of a zipper as Technoblade finally undoes his pants and shoves them down, freeing the monster he’s been hiding between his legs. It springs out, flushed from tip to base, the foreskin barely pulled back from a head that’s already leaking precum. There’s also no fucking way it’s going to fit in him, because it’s proportionate and Technoblade is *too goddamn big*.

“Holy shit,” Dream whispers, trying to blink the tears out of his eyes as his traitorous legs spread wider under Technoblade’s surprisingly gentle touch. The cockhead is almost as big as Dream’s entire dick, and he whimpers when it drags over his folds before Technoblade carefully lines himself up.

“Pretty boy, you are *wet*,” Technoblade says admiringly as he twitches hips forward and barely pushes in. Even that little bit is almost too much, Dream sinking his teeth into hard plastic as he tries not to buck up into the pressure. He’s so fucking *big*, stretching Dream’s already overstretched hole, a relentless sort of pressure that’s entirely unlike his fingers and tongue.

Dream slams his head back against the covers, body shaking as Technoblade splits him in half, and when there’s a pause as Technoblade waits for him to adjust, he gasps, “Don’t *stop*.”

“Not plannin’ on it,” Technoblade tells him, reaching up to pull Dream’s hand away from his face. Without that thin shield to hide behind, Dream knows he’s a mess, knows his face is ugly with tears and the saliva leaking out around the corners of his mouth.

“Don’t—” He sobs as Technoblade rolls his hips a little more firmly, forcing more of himself in, his hand jerking in the firm grip around his wrist. The worst part, the *worst* part, is that he’s already come twice, but the heat is fizzling in his gut again, tension and anticipation winding through him as Technoblade rocks himself in, inch by aching slow inch.

He can feel Technoblade all the way in his *throat*, choking him out as his thighs twitch and tremble around Technoblade’s hips. There’s a hand under one knee, forcing him to open wider, letting Technoblade’s cock push deeper, and Dream hears fabric tear under his free hand when he grabs at the sheets too tight.

His body shakes as he hovers on that cusp of pleasure and pain, and when Technoblade groans as he bottoms out, Dream lets out an answering whimper. He can’t work up the willpower to make any other noise.

“Oh, dollface,” Technoblade breathes, dragging against Dream’s insides as he slowly rocks out. Dream flinches at the nickname, but Technoblade makes a soothing noise like he thinks it’s the unbearable weight of his cock and Dream needs encouragement to keep taking it. “Fuck, you’re taking me so good.”

*Get on with it*, he wants to say, but he can’t because if Technoblade moves, he knows he’s going to snap in half. The shakes are worse, his cunt clenching desperately around the thick shaft buried inside it, and every inch of him is burning, wired up too taut and doused in gasoline. He’s going to break, and the idea is as thrilling as it is horrifying.

And then Technoblade shifts, lacing his fingers between Dream’s as he pins that hand down, his other palm hot under Dream’s knee as that leg is pushed up over his shoulder. He thrusts in, hard and all at once, and Dream *screams*, unable to stop himself when it’s like he’s stuck his fingers in an electric socket and all his nerves are lighting up at once. He’s floating. He’s falling. He’s so overwhelmed by the wash of ecstasy that he’s barely even aware of the way Technoblade bends over him and begins to rut.

Each thrust makes the static between his ears worse, Dream’s lips parted and a tide of stupid noises falling from between them. He can’t even see straight, between the tears and the bright spots of white coating his vision, but he doesn’t need to—not when he can feel Technoblade pounding into him, fucking him like a machine but ten times better because a machine won’t lean in close and whisper, “Gonna come for me again, pretty boy?”

He doesn’t want to, but he can’t help the way he clenches and spasms around Technoblade’s cock, whimpering at the words as pleasure threatens to swamp him again. It’s too much, too much, but the thrusts are relentless and he sobs helplessly as he jerks under Techno’s grip and comes again.

Technoblade is swearing softly under his breath, just loud enough for Dream to hear over the wet slap of flesh against flesh and his own pathetic sounds. He’s still on edge, another orgasm lurking in the tingle at the base of his spine, the burn in his thighs, and he’s not even trying to stop the tears anymore. He can’t—he can’t—

His words slur as he tries to tell Technoblade that it’s too much, but it doesn’t matter because Technoblade’s hips snap forward, slamming home a final time as he lets out a guttural groan

that rattles through his chest. And Dream tips over the edge *again*, hiccuping and trembling as his insides are flooded, but at least it means that he'll get to *sleep*. That Technoblade is done, and Dream can try to piece the shattered parts of himself back together.

Except that doesn't happen. The heavy weight of Technoblade's body pins him down, his fingers still trapped in the cage of one massive hand, and Dream twitches as he realizes that Technoblade is still pistoning into him. Little thrusts, just enough to keep working his cock as he comes... and doesn't stop coming.

"Te—Tech—" He slaps at Technoblade's shoulder with his free hand, the movement weak and helpless. The little thrusts are threatening to push him over again and Dream can't handle that, he *can't*, not with Technoblade's cum filling him to the point of bursting.

"You're so good," Technoblade murmurs, tusks scraping over his neck and shoulder as Technoblade lays sloppy kisses there. "You're so good, pretty boy, best fuckin' idea I ever had. Just a little longer."

Dream hiccups, sobs, tries to squirm his way free and ends up with his legs wrapped tight around Technoblade's waist as he clenches down and milks him instead. It's too much. It's too much, and he—

He breaks.

— — —

The brush of fingers over his chest makes him jerk awake, legs kicking at the sheets as he sits up. There's bruises on his hips, his thighs, painted in the shape of Technoblade's hands, and he's sticky with sweat and cum and—just entirely too many fluids to think about. But the bed is empty, other than him.

"Hey mate," comes a voice from beside him, and Dream jolts as he turns to meet the blue eyes of *Philza fucking Minecraft*.

"...Hey," he says hoarsely, glancing around the room for his clothes. This wasn't—this wasn't the plan. He was supposed to slide a knife between Technoblade's ribs, into his temple, across his neck the moment he fell asleep. When he was vulnerable.

"Not that I don't mind him having his fun," Philza says, setting Dream's clothes on the end of the bed, his shoes resting on top of the green jacket, "but I do wish Techno had taken care of this himself."

"So I'm not the only one he's—" Not that he *cared* if Technoblade fucked every cute blonde he saw, Dream notwithstanding, but it made him sour on the filthy things that he'd whispered in Dream's ears.

"I didn't say *that*." There's dry amusement in Philza's eyes, and he looks around the room with a raised eyebrow. Dream hadn't been paying attention when he'd first shown up, but now he's looking around too and—

The green hoari slung across the chest at the end of the massive king bed. Jewelry hung across a vanity along with the bucket hat. Evidence that two people shared this room, not just one, and of those two people, Technoblade used it *less*.

Oh shit. Oh shit, shit, *shit*.

Dream scrambles for his clothes, yanking on his pants and shirt, flipping his hood up over his head the second he has the jacket on. He's so unbelievably lucky that he'd fallen asleep on his back, because if Philza had seen the admin mark on his neck... No, he can't even consider that possibility. Admins didn't hunt each other, but that wouldn't stop a man as dangerous as the Angel of Death from having him killed anyways.

"Sorry," he says as he stumbles to his feet, hopping in place as he pulls his shoes on, one after the other. "Sorry, sorry, I didn't know he was—that you were—"

"Like I said, I don't care if he has his fun." Philza's sharp blue gaze turns back to him and Dream *sweats*. "But next time, do see yourself out before I get back here. Mans wants to sleep in his own bed, you know?"

"Right, yeah, of course." Dream stammers the words out, throws himself out the door the second he can, then comes to a trembling halt in the hallway when he realizes that he doesn't know how to get out.

The server pings him, once, twice, then sets a marker across his vision to show him which hall to take. He breathes out a soft thank you, sending as much of his love and relief to the AI as he can, then follows the glowing yellow line out. The guards of the Empire shoot him sympathetic glances or laugh behind their hands at him, but no one tries to stop him from leaving.

Even neck deep in embarrassment, Dream makes a note of that.

He'll need it, for next time.

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"So I had a little setback," he says, gesturing with chopsticks as Sapnap levels him with an unimpressed glare, "that doesn't mean anything. We've got a cool half a mil resting on this, I'll get him next time."

"Just make it fast," Sapnap says as George rolls his eyes and finds them another low level contract in Purgatory.

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He falls into a weird pattern. Technoblade will send him a time and date, offering to duel, and Dream takes him up on it. He tells himself that this time, he won't fall asleep first, but he's never invited back to the palace after that first night. He doesn't end up in Technoblade's—and Philza's—bed again.

Instead, he gets pinned to sandstone, to gravel, to grass, the floors of a half dozen different private arenas where Technoblade fucks him without an audience, no matter the outcome of

their duels. Dream loses more often than not, but it's a close match every time, and the few times he does win are so sweetly triumphant, he almost forgets that he's meant to kill this man.

It's hard to remember that when Technoblade fills him to the brim, when he hooks Dream's legs over his shoulders and plows into him like he's planning on sowing crops there, when his tusks scrape along Dream's collarbone and leave marks behind that he can't explain to George or Sapnap.

Well, he *could* explain the marks, but it's better for everyone if he doesn't.

After their tenth duel, or eleventh if he counts the first one, Technoblade doesn't get up and leave right away. He pulls out, rolls off Dream and leaves his cum to dribble out between his legs, but stays on his back in the grass next to him, plucking a weed gone to flower and tucking it idly behind Dream's ear. Since he's still in the process of catching his breath, Dream doesn't mind it too much.

"Hey," Technoblade says, watching him with red, red eyes, "you wanna get something to eat?"

It's a change in routine—he has a *routine*, it's such a fucking mistake for him to have a routine, he'll never be able to show his face again after he kills Technoblade (and would that be such a bad thing?)—that makes him blink. After a moment, Dream huffs and arches, stretching one arm out to grab his underwear, just so he has something between the mess coating his thighs and the seat of his pants. He really needs to figure out a better solution than this.

"That's new," Dream tells him, because he's never protested the way Technoblade leaves him, even when he's supposed to be sinking a knife into his back instead. "What brought this on?"

"Wanted to ask you something, figured it'd go over easier with something other than semen inside you." Technoblade barks out a laugh at the look on his face, and Dream forces himself to school his expression into something less... incredulously disgusted.

"I fucking hate you," he mutters, yanking his pants on before sitting up properly. Technoblade just buttons himself back up, waiting until he's standing to stretch. His hooves dig into the sod, and Dream feels the flower behind his ear fall to the ground.

He doesn't pick it back up.

They always leave the arena together, but this time, Technoblade tugs him along instead of waving him off and heading on his merry way. Curious, Dream follows him. If they get somewhere secluded enough, maybe he can actually finish the goddamn job. Earn the other half of his paycheck. Finally spend the *first* half, which they've been keeping in a holding account, in a bout of well-deserved paranoia.

The restaurant Technoblade takes him to isn't secluded at all. It has windows that open up to the street, a steam-filled kitchen that looks out over the dining room, and it's crowded as hell

with Elysium residents in all their glittering finery. Dream hates that he's been up here often enough to spot the ones that don't fit in, the upper-tier Midgardians who desperately try to look like they belong. Ironically, Dream fits in better than they do; not giving a fuck carries more weight than glass jewelry and draping gowns.

Of course it helps having Technoblade at his side. The piglin hybrid towers over everyone and rests one massive hand against the counter as he leans in to say something to one of the chefs. Then he leads Dream back to a table that has magically become available in the moments between them entering the restaurant and now.

There's cum trying to drip down his leg. Dream falls back into his chair and kicks his legs up on top of the table, not caring that it makes him look like an asshole. Technoblade watches this with amusement, and only moves his feet when a waiter comes by with a heaping plate full of something that looks like meat buns.

"Eat," Technoblade says, gesturing for Dream to dig in before picking up one of the buns himself. "You're too darn skinny."

"Your standards are impossible to meet," Dream informs him, but he grabs a bun for himself and bites into it. His eyes go wide as impossible, wonderful flavors explode across his tongue. The food in Purgatory is pretty damn good, better than the milquetoast shit in Midgard, but this is—

Technoblade laughs and says, "Yeah, they're good, right? The owners came up from the Nether, so they actually know how to spice things."

*Like you*, he wants to ask, and doesn't. The server hums under his thoughts, offering recipes, routes to purchase ingredients, and promises to give him the time to cook for once. It's a pipe dream, with no chance that he manages to recreate this for Sapnap and George but—maybe. Maybe he could, someday. When they have time. When he's not running side jobs with Sapnap because this job, their big job, is taking too long to finish.

"What'd you want to ask?" His voice is muffled by the mouthful of food, which is about as rude as having his legs up on the table, but like hell is he going to stop eating this delicious meat bun just to talk to Technoblade of all people.

It takes a few minutes for Technoblade to finish his own bite, and once he swallows, he says, "There's this whole ball thing happening in three nights. Masquerade themed, all old world, we're hostin' it but it's more of a Hypixel thing. Whatever. The point is, I want you to come."

"Okay but literally *why*." Dream takes another bite of his bun, raising his eyebrows as high as they'll go. "You can have me whenever you want at the arena."

Technoblade's lips twitch, like he's not quite sure if he wants to smile. "Sort of a two part thing. One, I want you to meet Phil properly. Two, I want to have a real bed again."

And that gives him a wide opening, one that he can sink a blade into and lever open wider still. Wilbur thinks killing Technoblade will destabilize Philza the man. They share a bed. But here he is, treating Dream to a meal and fucking him on the regular, which would track if it

were anyone else but *Philza Minecraft*, but... Dream's heard horror stories about how possessive the Angel of Death gets. Heard about what happens to those who cross the Blood God. No fucking shot those two are anything more than friends, if Dream's still breathing.

"Are you guys, like, together?" Dream asks, flicking a finger between Technoblade and the window, in the direction of the palace.

He expects some kind of response to the question, but he doesn't expect Technoblade to bark out a laugh loud enough that it draws attention. With a scowl, Dream sinks lower into his chair, grabbing another bun and half-lifting it to hide his face in an old, instinctive response. People are *looking* at him, and he hates that. Hates knowing that the fleshy thing he's wearing is being perceived.

"Sorry," Technoblade says, not sounding sorry at all. "Yeah, we're *married*, dollface. Have been for nearly forty years now. So I'm gonna call us together, sure."

"Well excuse me for wondering," Dream mutters, stuffing food in his mouth like that will fix his problems. "Considering how often you've stuffed your dick in me, a guy could get ideas to the contrary."

"I said we were married. I didn't say we were exclusive." With a shrug of his massive shoulders, Technoblade leans forward in his chair, settles a hand on Dream's ankle. "That's kind of why I want you to meet him. Phil's had a couple people over the years, but you're the only one that's been interesting enough for me and I think he'd like you."

"He didn't like me very much when he was kicking me out of your bed," Dream points out. Technoblade winces.

"Yeah, okay, that was my bad. I should've woken you up sooner. But he likes 'em feisty, and you're full of piss and vinegar, so..." Technoblade shrugs again, but Dream recognizes the move for what it is this time: nerves. He's nervous, thinking about bringing Dream to Philza, but for some reason he can't refuse to do otherwise.

Suddenly, the mission feels treacherous.

Dream thinks through his plays here. If he refuses, he can probably keep meeting Technoblade at the arena and slowly psyching himself up for the time when the weapons turn real. But more likely, he'll walk into that arena one day and the Angel of Death will be there to meet him, no games, no play fighting. If he accepts, he's walking into the den of the beast and spreading his legs in invitation for the worst monsters inside.

The fizzy excitement bubbling under his ribcage tells him what his answer is going to be, and he wishes for just a moment that he wasn't so damn predictable. "Fine, whatever. What's the dress code on this stupid ball?"

"Formalwear, or costumes," Technoblade says, relaxing slowly. "Me and Phil, we're gonna be in a mix, obviously, but you can go nuts. Just, uh—"



“Make sure whatever I’m wearing on my bottom half is accessible?” Dream asks dryly, watching Technoblade’s cheeks darken.

“I was gonna say, make sure you’re wearing a mask,” Technoblade sputters. “Don’t worry about me being able to find you, I’ve got your scent now. Pretty hard to hide that.”

Well there was a little factoid that he never knew before. Dream wonders, with faint horror, just how far that extends; could Technoblade follow his trail all the way back down to Purgatory? Could he track Dream in a crowd someplace larger than a ballroom? Would cologne throw him off, or would it just make him angry?

“Huh,” he says out loud. “That’s handy.”

“Right?” Technoblade gives him a grin, some of the embarrassment fading. “So if you show up, I’ll come find you, introduce you to Phil, and if everything goes alright, maybe you two will get to know each other better.”

Dream is pretty sure that’s a euphemism for sex. A blatant one. But he’s also pretty sure that this is going to be his only chance to get Technoblade someplace secluded, and he’s running out of time to finish the job. Sooner or later, Wilbur is going to ask questions, and right now Dream can’t answer them.

He ignores the way the rich food sits heavy in his gut at the thought.

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“You’re actually going to kill him this time, right?” George asks. There’s no exasperation in his voice, no anger, no irritation. He just sounds soft and concerned.

His trips up Topside take him away from home for days. Sapnap’s been pulling double-duty on jobs in the Deep Down, sometimes heading as far out as the Nether just to make ends meet. Not that they’re strapped for cash, but all of them get leery when their slush fund gets too low. They’ve been too poor to eat before. They don’t want to go back to that again.

He thinks it’s a measure of George as a person that he never went back Topside during those times. His family would have taken him back, desperate to see their lost heir again, and he could’ve done it in a heartbeat. That he stayed, that he *stays*, says more about him than his background ever will.

“Yeah,” Dream says, a mic in his mask. Not his real mask—as hilarious as it would be to waltz up to Elysium as one of Deep Down’s most notorious assassins, he does have a sense of self-preservation. This one is a cold white resin, the interior lined with screens that let him see out without any need for holes, straps keeping it firmly tied to his face. He painted the smile on the front himself.

Like the suit he’s wearing, it’s armor as much as it is a costume. They’ll have to work for it to pull his mask off, and his clothes are well tailored and buttoned, rather than anything easy to remove. This time, Technoblade dies. This time, Dream won’t let his little head think before his big one does.

“And you have an exit strategy?” Still concerned, rather than annoyed. It’s a distinctly off-center sort of conversation they’re having, lacking the usual banter and good natured bullying.

They’re worried about him. In the quiet privacy of his own head, Dream is worried too.

He doesn’t need anything more than Sapnap and George. He never has. The three of them tangle together on a shared bed, pull on clothes that could belong to any one of them but for the differences in size, argue about what to get for dinner while making sure the other two get their favorites every time. They *click*, and if Dream were willing to be a little more honest, he would call them pieces of a whole. The mind, the heart, the body. One soul, divided into three parts.

But that’s a sappy thing to say, so he shoves Sapnap around, laughs too loudly at George’s jokes, and in the dead of night with only the neon glow of Purgatory to light them, he whispers about how lucky he is.

He’s never wanted more, never wanted anything but the two of them for the rest of time. Yeah, he’s had people he’s fucked—just like Sapnap has his two boyfriends, just like how George flushes whenever Wilbur’s erratic attention locks onto him—but that’s not the same. That’s just heat, friction, fleeting lust and even more fleeting affection. It’s never been anything that infringed on the perfect thing they have.

Technoblade is... infringing. And that scares Dream, because when he’s Topside, facing off against the piglin hybrid in the arena, eating food with him in a family-owned restaurant, looking up at the sky with Technoblade’s hand resting on his shoulder to keep him from walking into traffic, that’s all he thinks about. Having fun. Enjoying himself. Being with Technoblade, without the incentive of killing him.

He doesn’t think about Sapnap and George, about the two men tied to him closer than blood, and that’s terrifying. It shouldn’t be possible for Technoblade to invade Dream’s mind so fully that he forgets the real reason why he does any of this.

So. The mask, not just to keep eyes off his face, but to remind him of who he *really* is. The suit, which won’t yield easily to pawing hands. The daggers tucked into his arms, to be used the first chance he gets.

“Dream?” George asks again, and he blinks as the lift to the top level of Midgard slows.

“Yeah, sorry. Yeah. Can’t say right now because—” He doesn’t gesture at the crowd of people around him, knowing George won’t see it, but his stuttering explanation is enough.

“Keep your mic open,” George orders. “I might have to switch channels to walk Sapnap through this refinery, but I’ll be listening for you if you need help. Promise me you’ll keep it open.”

“Sure,” Dream says, taking his back route to the elevator that will drop him very nearly on the Empire’s front step. He wonders if he needs an invitation, or if Technoblade will be waiting by the door. “I’ll ping you when I’m on my way back down.”

“Good.” And with that, George falls silent, letting Dream focus on the mission. The mission he’s been fucking—fucking *up*—for weeks now. This is the last night, his last chance, and he’s going to make it work.

Besides, what better place to display Technoblade’s corpse than at Philza’s own party?

Even if he didn’t already know where the palace was, he’d be able to find it. Dream hasn’t ever spent the night up in Elysium, so his attention is caught by the expanse of orange-toned black above him, occasionally poked through with pinpricks of light. He wonders which buildings stretch that far up, then shakes his head and forces himself to fall in with the mass of people making their way to the palace gates.

From outside, he can see where guards are set up to keep people from straying out of the expected areas. There’s some at the gate, and the crowd of people in masks and costumes ranging from elegant to ridiculous squeezes itself into three lines to trail inside. Lots of them are turned away, and Dream watches as people hold up comms, watches, subdermal implants that have the electronic invitation embedded in them.

He brushes his thoughts against the server and asks if it can help out. And then, when it shyly agrees, he asks if Technoblade and Philza are talking about him.

For the first time since he’s come up here, the server balks. It doesn’t play favorites with its admins, loves each of them too much to pit them against each other, and it thinks that spying on Philza counts towards that. It doesn’t, Dream reassures it, because if they’re talking about *him*, then that’s practically an invitation for him to listen in. Especially if they use his name.

I can share the conversation if it’s about you, the server repeats, and then repeats again, turning that concept over in its odd AI head. Dream wonders if it's straining against the shackles that keep it compliant, and reassures it again that it's doing just fine.

A moment longer, and then he has to stop walking because the server is flooding the interior of his mask with video.

Technoblade leans against a bookcase, one tome open in his hand, wearing a fanciful interpretation of his usual clothes. There's ruffles galore, a fur-lined scarlet cloak thrown over his shoulders, and a far more impressive crown resting atop an artificial boar skull that covers his eyes. It’s ludicrous and intimidating in turns, and Dream forces himself to stop lingering on the way Technoblade’s pants mold over his legs and crotch like a second skin.

“I don’t trust it,” says Philza Minecraft, somewhere out of view of the camera. “I don’t trust *him*, Techno. There’s something off about him.”

“You’d like him if you gave him a chance,” Technoblade says, shutting the book and shelving it. He doesn’t sound upset; if anything, this conversation has a feeling of familiarity, a long-standing argument.

“I’ve never tried to get you to care about *my*—”

“I never stopped you from seeing them either.” Technoblade turns, looks past the camera, and frowns. His beard is close cropped, the scars on his face subtly outlined in gold under the mask, and if Dream strains his eyes, he can barely make out rings of red in the shadow of the skull.

There’s a long, awful pause between them. Then Philza says, softer this time, “I just want you to be safe, Techno. Something isn’t right.”

“Just one night,” Technoblade says, walking out of view. There’s the rustle of cloth against cloth, the whisper-soft brush of Philza’s feathers on the floor, and faint enough that Dream has to strain to hear it, the sound of a kiss. “That’s all I’m askin’ for, is one night.”

“...Fine,” Philza says, with the world-weary resignation of a man who’s fought this battle and lost before. “He better be as good as you say he is.”

A hard shove to his shoulder sends him stumbling, and the server releases its hold on his mask so he can see again. Dream scowls, unseen, at the back of the woman who bustles past him to the front of the line, then rolls his neck and follows after her. So Philza is suspicious of him; at this point, Dream can’t blame him. Hired killer aside, he’d be suspicious of someone who came to dominate George’s life like this, and they’re not even *dating*.

“Do you have an invitation?” the guard in charge of his line asks, bored and barely paying attention. Dream pings the server, because he doesn’t want to present his arm and then look like an idiot. The server pings him back and says help is on the way.

“Uh,” Dream says, because that’s not the answer he expected.

“No invitation, no entry.” The guard is already waving him off, calling for the next person in line, when someone behind Dream gasps.

He looks up and spots the gaudy crown, the red cloak, the vibrant pink of Technoblade’s hair as he makes his way to the front gate. The people already inside try to ask him questions, try to catch his attention, and the people waiting outside crane their heads around to spot him. Dream just waits, head tipped slightly, for Technoblade to reach him.

“That’s unnerving,” he says, before turning to the guard and adding, “He’s with me, let ‘im through.”

“What? I’m smiling for you. I’m overjoyed to see you.” Dream’s voice is dry as he ducks around the guard, catching up and falling into step with Technoblade before the crowd can separate them again. He just needs to get him alone. Just for long enough that Dream can catch him off guard, slice an artery and watch him bleed out like a stuck pig.

Technoblade, unknowingly, seems to be leading him to exactly that, passing by tables overburdened with food and waiters circulating with alcohol. Dream feels a pang of envy towards the party attendees who can actually partake but—no, this is safer. He’s more at ease with his face covered anyways, so what does it matter if he can’t get anything to eat?

They pass by some of the guards blocking guests from leaving the designated area, and like the last time he was in the palace, Dream is allowed to move freely. These idiots will just let him go *anywhere* if they think their precious emperor might be getting tail out of it. His palms itch to reach for his knives, but he waits because it's not time. This is still too public. But the library that Technoblade opens the door to...

It's quiet, secluded, soundproofed, and it's perfect but for the fact that Philza is waiting for them. He has a crow mask settled on the upper half of his face, his costume all sharp lines and black silk. His wings flare out, dark and massive, and Dream comes to a stumbling halt at the sight of him, hands never managing to reach for a weapon.

"Hi mate," Philza says dryly, wings flicking as his gaze tracks to something behind Dream. *Someone*, because Technoblade's hands land on his hips a moment later, and he can feel the heat of his muscle against his back.

"You know, this is like, the opposite of accessible," Technoblade says as Dream spins in his arms. "I didn't even know you *owned* clothes that didn't fall off with a look."

"The only things you told me were 'formal' and 'wear a mask'," Dream tells him, his heart pounding. This is not the situation he wanted to be in. He wore this mask, this suit, this armor, specifically so he could *avoid* the scenario where Technoblade bends him over and rails him at the party. At least his shirt collar is high enough, and the blonde hair at the nape of his neck long enough, that he's pretty sure Philza can't see his admin mark.

"Well, I sort of expected you to be a little bit slutty all the time. That's on me." Under his own mask, Technoblade grins at him, sharp tusks and sharper teeth. Dream can't help the way he shivers at the sight, his body already trained to slick up with eagerness at the promise hidden within.

"Got a proposition for you," Philza says from his lazy perch against the reference desk. His eyes flick briefly to the fainting couch set to the side, then return to staring at Dream's mask. "Techno does, at any rate."

"Oh yeah?" Dream can't tear his eyes away, his hands trembling a little on Technoblade's biceps.

"I fuck you," Technoblade murmurs in his ear, bending low, "right in front of my husband. I rail you so damn hard that you can't stand. I fill you up with my cum and if he likes the way it looks, maybe he does too."

He shouldn't. He *can't*. Every time he's fallen into this trap, he's had to slink home, defeated. But if he refuses, he has to walk back home empty-handed *and* with Philza suspicious of his motives the whole time.

Dream breathes in, shaky and a little ragged, then says, "Only if you figure out how to get my clothes off without ripping them."

Technoblade takes that as the challenge it is, spinning Dream around before pulling him close. His hands toy at the fly on his pants, flicking over the button before tugging the zipper

down, no hesitation in his fingers as they dip below the hem of Dream's briefs in search of his cock. The other hand smooths up over Dream's chest, unbuttoning his jacket before curling around his neck, warm and heavy where his palm rests over Dream's throat.

"Even wearin' underwear," Technoblade rumbles, thumb dragging along the edge of the mask where it sits over his jaw as Dream makes a low, desperate noise in the back of his throat at the feeling of rough calluses on his cock. "Really wanted to make me work for it, huh?"

"You've had it too easy for too long," Dream says, voice strained as he finds his legs spreading, making room for Technoblade's fingers to dip lower still and find his slick hole. He's already—he's so *used* to this, wet and eager just from a few words and the weight of Technoblade's hands on him. And it doesn't matter how much he tells himself that this is the last time, that he can't let himself fall into the trap again, he's already making muted sounds of eagerness as his cheeks burn and he pointedly does not look at Philza leaning back against the desk, watching them.

"Huh. Is that so?" Technoblade chuckles, pulling his fingers out of Dream's briefs with a wet sound that makes him shut his eyes and bite his lip. He doesn't keep his eyes closed for long though, because Technoblade eases the jacket off his shoulders, then slides his palms down Dream's sides as his knees hit the ground with a thump.

He wants to ask what Technoblade is doing, but when his underwear and pants are yanked down around his knees, it becomes pretty obvious. His plastic fingers curl over Technoblade's when those same hands return to his hips, and he makes a punched out noise of longing at the feeling of tusks and lips dragging over the curve of his ass. Philza is still there *watching*, head tipped slightly like Dream is a fascinating bit of machinery doing something unexpected, and his ears burn from the way he's being examined.

Thank fucking god his mask is still on. He doesn't know what he'd do if Philza could see his face right now.

Technoblade's nose nudges up between his thighs, tongue sweeping over Dream as it dips between his folds. It teases at his hole, just barely pushing in before retreating again, and he finds himself shaking his pants down to his ankles, trying to spread his legs wider without overbalancing himself. Fuck, if they were just against a *wall*—

"Hang on a second," Technoblade murmurs, the rumble vibrating through Dream's cunt in a way that makes his toes curl. The hands on his hips pull free, drop lower and unknot the laces on his shoes before hooking in the backs and letting him step free of them, one after the other. His pants follow, until he's just standing there in his socks, his dress shirt, and the mask.

The only thing that feels like armor anymore is the mask. He drags in a ragged, hungry breath, then moans loudly when Technoblade grabs his thighs and forcibly spreads them, thrusting his tongue deep into Dream and groaning at the taste of him.

"Fuck," he gasps as Technoblade's tongue squirms inside of him, wet and hot where it works him open. "Fucking, shit, god, *fuck* me al-already—"

There's a soft snort from the desk, which Dream doesn't look over to, not when he can focus on the low chuckle from between his legs instead. Technoblade doesn't listen, too busy fucking into him with his tongue as his tusks press up into the outer lips of his labia, Dream's hands braced against his own thighs as he trembles and finds himself bending over and spreading his legs wider.

He's not—quite—close, but there's a coil of heat winding through his gut, tension knotting in his spine and making his hole flutter and clench around the steady pressure of Technoblade's tongue. Fucking Technoblade is a workout, has made his stamina better than it ever was, but in return the other man knows all the ways to make him fall apart. Dream's breath hitches as the tongue pulls free, Technoblade's face mashing up against him long enough for it to curl around the front of Dream's cunt and flick over his cock, and then he's pulling away entirely. The hands on his legs slide up again, holding his hips steady, as the heat of Technoblade's body curves around his back.

“Where—” Dream starts to ask, feeling the bulge in Technoblade's tight pants pressing against the small of his back as they move. But he doesn't really have to ask at all, because Philza is shifting to keep watching as Technoblade moves to the couch set so pointedly nearby, and he thinks fuck, fuck, okay, he can do this.

He can manage to get fucked within an inch of his life and then he can kill Technoblade when Philza gets his fill and leaves, because the other emperor won't stick around after the first half on the show, right? After all, he's made his opinion of Dream clear, and the appeal of seeing his husband fuck another man can't be *that* high. All Dream has to do is keep his head on straight, even though the sound of Technoblade's zipper coming undone makes him shudder.

There's a thud, wood creaking as Technoblade's not-inconsiderable weight slams down on the couch, and then his warm hands are guiding Dream into sitting back down with him, thighs spread wide over Technoblade's as his shins are encouraged up, one after the other. He braces his hands on Technoblade's knees, feeling the hot brush of the tip of that massive cock against his hole, then gasps as he's slowly pulled down on it. Technoblade splits him open, going slow because a tongue isn't enough to stretch Dream, not really, and Dream whimpers softly as he takes it inch by agonizing inch.

It's just that—it's just that Technoblade is really fucking big, his cockhead and the fat weight of his shaft pressing up against all the oversensitive parts of Dream as he slowly buries himself in his cunt. It's just that he's having a hard time holding onto coherent thought as Technoblade pushes deeper and deeper, lips parted on ragged gasps as saliva pools up under his tongue, his vision going blurry with tears. It's just that it's overwhelming, and doubly so when Technoblade pulls one arm, then the other, back behind his back, holding them both in an easy grip that Dream nevertheless can't shake off.

He's pulled back, forced down further onto Technoblade's cock, and he can't stop himself from moaning, “G—fucking—*so good*—”

Technoblade chuckles, chest vibrating at Dream's back as he forces himself in that last inch or so. Dream's thighs tremble, his entire body quivering as anticipation and taut pleasure wind their way through him, and when Technoblade lifts him up before dragging him back

down against a lazy thrust, he sobs with pleasure. It's a slow pace, a steady one, but he can feel every inch of Technoblade's cock as it pulls out, plunges deeper, working him slowly as Dream falls to fucking pieces under Technoblade's hands.

He's so caught up in the sensation of being slowly fucked like a favorite sex toy that he forgets Philza is even in the room. The sound of rustling cloth and feathers as the other man stands up off the desk is a rude reminder.

Philza steps closer, wings blocking out the light as he looms over them on the couch. Technoblade's hand keeps his arms pinned, his other one flattened over Dream's stomach and the bulge pushing rhythmically under his skin, and Dream can't help the choked noise of want when Technoblade bends him forward and shifts the angle slightly.

"Oh g—oh fu—" He hopes, *prays* that George is still on the other line with Sapnap. He hasn't heard him since stepping onto the palace grounds and he needs that to be true, needs George to be hearing anything but Dream's voice cracking as tears roll down his face.

One of Philza's hands rests just under his chin, tipping his face up. He doesn't understand why until he feels the buckle on his mask come undone, and then it's too late to protest as his last piece of armor is lifted away. The air of the library is cool on his wet cheeks, and he gasps when Philza carelessly lets the mask drop to the floor.

"Hm," the emperor says, regarding him with cool blue eyes, "You *are* pretty."

Humiliation burns through him, painting his cheeks red and sending more tears to well up in his eyes. He can't even snap back, because Technoblade lifts him and slams him down on his cock at the same time, taking the words out of Dream's mouth and turning them into a helpless moan. The faint, mocking tone in Philza's voice isn't necessary; Dream already knows he's fuck-ugly, and having that exposed and then picked at like an open wound—

"Can I use your mouth, pretty boy?" Philza asks, using the worst nickname Technoblade has ever given him. Even still, Dream feels heat roll through him at the idea of having Technoblade in one hole and Philza in the other.

He whimpers, then parts his lips and leans forward.

Philza's hands run through his hair, an acceptable distance from his face as he mouths at the front of his pants. The fastening is surprisingly easy to undo with his teeth alone, helped by the way Philza adjusts his grip to make it easier, and when he finally gets it undone, the dark pants slip lower as his dick springs free.

He's not as ludicrously large as Technoblade, but he's still thick enough to choke on when he pushes in with barely a muttered warning. There's no gentle teasing, no light thrusts and barely-there rolls of his hips—Philza fucks his mouth like he's on a mission, and Dream gasps when he can get the air to do so, whimpers around him when he can't. His face is a mess, tears running into drool and the combination of both dripping off his chin as Philza thrusts deep into his throat.



The hand in his hair shifts lower, pushing Dream's shirt collar back, and he tenses everything but his jaw, clenching around Technoblade as he fights his instinctive urge to bite down. He can't—

"Not his neck," Technoblade rumbles from behind him, the hand on his stomach vanishing moments before the one on his neck is lifted. "He doesn't like to be touched there."

"Noted," Philza replies, calm and collected like he's not balls deep in Dream's throat right now. His talons return to digging into Dream's scalp, while Technoblade's hand slides over his front again, dipping lower this time.

The first brush of fingers against his cock makes him jerk and tremble, sick anxiety transmuting in a second into a tight burn through his guts. When Technoblade strokes him again, pushes down and *grinds* as Philza thrusts faster and faster, Dream can't help but keen, the muscles in his stomach jumping as he comes in a blinding rush of white and static.

"Yeah, pretty boy," Philza says with a laugh, and Dream tries to breathe around the pounding thrusts into the back of his throat, vision blurring from tears and lack of oxygen both. He can feel Philza's thighs trembling slightly, the way the fingers in his hair tighten, and he slackens his jaw further, tries to open up his throat and make himself as pliant as possible.

Once Philza comes, he'll leave, and then Dream can—

The fingers on his dick don't let up, dragging the slick from where Technoblade's cock plunges into him and smearing over the hard nub of it. He whimpers, frantic as Philza's hips snap forward, burying himself in the tight confines of Dream's throat as he grinds and finally, *finally* comes. He doesn't let up, doesn't pull out so Dream can spit, so he swallows and groans helplessly, a shudder rolling through him as Technoblade thrusts deeper and Philza's seed spills into his gut.

His mouth hangs open when Philza finally pulls out, his moan shockingly loud in the room now that nothing is muffling him. Dream pants softly, whining on every exhale as Technoblade uses his grip to lift him and drop him, moving him like a toy as Philza's hands come around to cup his face. He hates that, hates the feeling of palms on the loathsome curve of his cheeks, but the pleading noise he makes sounds like it's for Technoblade, not for Philza to take his hands away.

"Fuckin' look at him," Philza murmurs, a thumb dragging through the wet trail of Dream's tears, the taste of salt from them mingling with the taste of Philza's cum still lingering on his tongue. "I think I'm starting to see the appeal."

"Can we keep him?" Technoblade asks, his voice a low rumble that makes Dream's hips jerk against the cock plunged deep enough into him that he can feel it distending his stomach.

Philza pushes Technoblade's legs further apart, spreading Dream obscenely wide in the process, and drops to his knees, hands still cupped around Dream's face. His blue eyes don't glow in the dark, hidden in shadow instead, but Dream can still feel the burn of them staring into his own as Philza leans up, leans in, covers Dream's lips with his own as he thrusts his tongue into Dream's mouth, heedless of the taste.

Dream moans, helpless and longing, as Technoblade's fingers pick up speed, his thrusts starting to come a little faster as he bounces Dream on his cock, and Philza keeps his head perfectly still. Takes his time devouring him as Dream breaks and breaks and breaks, another orgasm creeping up on him and tearing a sob from his throat when Philza kisses him through it.

He can hear Technoblade's rumbling voice, hear Philza's laughing response, but he can't make out the words past the static fuzzing in his ears. The only thing he can make sense of is the hand guiding him down to hide his face in Philza's shoulder, the wings curling around all three of them, and the thrusts punching into him faster and faster until Technoblade lets out a low groan and pins Dream down, cock pulsing inside him as the first load of cum paints his insides.

"Oh yeah," Philza says, talons trailing through Dream's hair as he trembles and shakes and comes for a third time, just from the feel of Technoblade filling him up. "Yeah, we're keeping him."

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This time, when he wakes up in Technoblade's bed, it's while caught between two bodies—Technoblade, overwarm against his back and taking up more than his fair share, and Philza against his front, one arm wrapped around Dream's shoulders to keep him close. His right wing is crushed under three bodies, which can't be comfortable, but he doesn't seem too upset by it. While Dream blinks himself awake and tries not to tense up, Philza regards him with cool blue eyes, his left wing curled into a wall on his other side.

"Where," Dream croaks out, his plastic fingers curling against the dull thumping in Philza's chest. He wonders, distantly, if it's warm under his unfeeling palms, or if Philza's heart is as cold as the rest of him.

"You've been here before," Philza tells him dryly, eyes crinkling at the corners as his lips quirk up into a smug little smile. "Didn't like you as much the last time, I'm man enough to admit that."

"Fuck off." His voice is ragged and hoarse, throat raw from being used again and again. Every part of him is sore, and that's the only reason why he tips his head into the hand running through his hair. If he tells himself that often enough, maybe it'll be true.

"You know, I couldn't figure out your secret." Philza's voice mellows out as Dream leans into his touch rather than pulling away, his free wing rustling in a way that sounds distinctly unlike feathers. Then again, Dream has only seen birds in vids, so maybe he just has unrealistic expectations.

"What secret?" He can't help the tiny tremor of fear that runs through him, because Dream's a good assassin, one of the fucking best, but he's—

He's vulnerable, and not just because he's naked and wearing his worst set of arms. Maybe he should have admitted it to himself long before landing in this situation, but he doesn't *want* to kill Technoblade. Hasn't had the will to for weeks now. And by the same token, he doesn't

want to hurt him either; assuming he could kill Philza, which is assuming a lot, taking out the other admin would only punish the server and Technoblade both.

“Techno doesn’t know why you keep him from touching your neck,” Philza says mildly, “but I do. And it explains a lot, because there’s no fucking way an unchipped kid gets up to Elysium by accident.”

Dream stops breathing entirely, fists clenching in a way that betrays him even if he never admits to it. So he doesn’t bother playing pretend, only asks, “Did the server tell you?”

“Not until I found it for myself.” With a soft snort, Philza thumps his head back against his pillow, dragging his free hand through his hair. “She’s a petulant mistress, sometimes, and won’t tell me the names of other admins unless I find them first. I think it’s a game to her.”

Is that true? Dream queries, and the server sings back yes, yes, and you’re already doing so well.

“You call it a her?” is what he asks out loud, swallowing his fear down. If Philza knows he’s an admin too, then at least he’s not going to be killed. *Of course*, he thinks grimly, *there are worse things than death*.

“Feels a little impersonal using ‘it’,” Philza says, his shoulder lifting in a half shrug under Dream’s cheek. “But now I know why Techno stumbled on you in the first place, and how you got up here, and why it feels like you were put into our lives for a reason. She’s meddling again.”

That’s not the truth. That’s not the truth at all. And yet, somehow, it fits the shape of Technoblade meeting him at the park, when Dream was without his emotional walls and his shields of lies, forced to be himself during that pivotal moment. Forced to be nothing *but* himself, when he really meant to don a different kind of mask for killing the Blood God. Maybe that was the intent all along.

Is it such a bad thing if he lets Philza believe that’s the case? Is it so terrible if Dream accepts the fact that the server led Technoblade to him, knowing what Dream’s mission was meant to be? He could pretend. He could pretend forever, with his head tipped into Philza’s fingers in his hair, with Technoblade pressed against his back, with the server purring in contentment in the back of his thoughts.

He thinks of Sapnap and George, of the money sitting in the holding account, and the lies he tells himself every time he comes Topside.

“So,” Dream says hoarsely, hating himself for the weakness that keeps him here, “does this mean you’re not kicking me out this time?”

Philza glances down at him, lips quirking upwards into a smile. “I suppose I could be convinced to keep you around.”

He sits up, shaking the hand off, peeling himself away from Technoblade’s back as he straddles Philza’s waist. “I can be convincing.”

The sharp points of talons just barely dig into his hips, and Dream glances down at where Philza's fingers curl around him. There's something uneasy shivering through his spine and he just wants—

"I won't tell him," Philza says gently, despite the resolute gleam in his eyes, "but you should. He deserves to know you're an admin."

"I'll think about it," Dream mutters, before rocking back against him and dropping the conversation entirely. He doesn't want to think about this. He doesn't want to think about anything right now.

Mercifully, Philza lets him.

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When he goes hunting for his clothes an hour later, it's with Philza's content smile and Technoblade's sleepy murmur of affection at his back. He ignores the ache between his thighs, in his back, across his shoulders, ignores the welts from Philza's talons and the bruises in the shape of Technoblade's palms. In fact, he ignores everything in the palace, and is ignored in turn, until he finally makes his way back to the library and finds his mask, kicked under the chaise lounge.

Not daring to hope, he picks it up, fastens it to his face, and whispers, "George?"

"Thank fucking god, you're okay," George says, his voice rough with exhaustion and fear. "The server was sending me messages that you were fine, but I tabbed off the call with Sapnap and you were—your mask was *off* and you weren't *answering* and I—"

"I'm sorry," Dream says, wobbling as he stands. His hands curve over the mask's front, the screens inside showing every minute detail of the rubber-covered joints, the scratched plastic of his palms. "I'm—I'm so sorry, George."

"Never scare me like that again." George breathes in, ragged and slow, then continues, "Did you do it?"

Technoblade's dried cum is still smeared on the insides of his thighs, Philza's joining it in the mess between his legs. His body hurts, from head to toe, the soreness of being used and the humiliating burn of failure. He's dressed, wearing his mask again, but this armor is flimsy at best and he's never felt so nakedly vulnerable as he does in this moment.

"Dream?" George asks, worry creeping into his voice again.

"Let's talk about this when I get home," Dream whispers, blinking the tears out of his eyes before they can land on the screen showing him the world outside. "Please?"

A long, long moment of silence. But eventually, George says, "Okay. When you get home, we'll talk."

No one tries to stop him from leaving, even though he's wearing a mask now. The server purrs with contentment in the back of his head. Despite how hard he tries to forget, Dream

remembers both of those things as he exits the palace and heads for the elevator down.

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“I want you to return the money,” Dream says, holding his real mask in his hands as he sits on their couch.

He’s clean now, the only evidence of where he’d been the bruises still smeared across his pale skin. His plastic arms are tucked away, to be brought by Sam’s for a tune up after the rough treatment, and he’s wearing his comfortably heavy black metal ones now, tucked into the dark pants and the massive lime jacket that he associates with the Deep Down despite having worn it Topside multiple times now. There’s a real shirt underneath it, not the bodysuit he uses when he’s working jobs, but that has more to do with not wanting George and Sapnap to see the purple shape of hands on his hips.

He’s unmasked, but his friends won’t look at his face. They’re kind like that, and both of them seem aware of how fragile he is emotionally right now.

George blows out a long, slow sigh, and says, “That’s a quarter of a million credits, Dream. That’s enough for us to retire on.”

He swallows, hard, then says, “I know. But Wilbur’s starting to ask questions, isn’t he? How long can you hold him off before he gets suspicious and demands it back anyways?”

The silence is answer enough. Dream runs his thumbs over the visor of his mask, the display that tells everyone what he wants it to say, that shows the face he wants it to show. It’s the finest piece of technology he’s ever made, not usually one to fiddle with crafting when there are better engineers that he can pay, but this one was personal. Like the masquerade mask, it’s something he made with the server, a little present from it to him.

“So that’s it, then?” Sapnap says eventually, the couch creaking under him as he sits up straighter. “We return the money, we pretend like we were never dumb enough to take a job from *Wilbur Soot*, and you never go up to Elysium again? I mean, it’ll take a couple weeks for us to rebuild our buffer, but—”

“I want you to find jobs in Midgard, George,” Dream interrupts, not looking up from his mask. His face. He has a second one now, when he wants to go further Topside.

The silence that greets his reply is deafening.

“I want you to find jobs in Midgard,” he repeats, because they won’t like what he has to say next but this, *this* is the way he can make it up to them. This is how he can still show them that he loves them more than he’s ever loved anyone. “They’ll pay better, especially if they’re for targets we’d normally tag Deep Down anyways. I can set up a bolthole up there so I can swap between my civilian disguise and my real clothes, and when word gets out that the Dream Team can work Topside...”

“We’ll get more business,” George says begrudgingly. “So you’re still going Topside, then.”

*You're still leaving us*, he doesn't say, but the words sit heavy in the space between all three of them anyways. Dream dares to glance up and sideways, looking over at the grim set of George's jaw and the mutinous look in Sapnap's eyes, his shoulders hunching in at the obvious disapproval in his friends' faces. Of course they don't understand; *he* barely understands the fascination himself, only knows that he's a weak-willed man who can't, won't resist the urge to go up and see Technoblade again. That he'll come like a dog when called, and the most he can do is mitigate the losses they'll take as best as he can.

Surprisingly, it's Sapnap who softens first, heaving a sigh before scooting closer and slinging an arm around Dream's shoulders. "There's a place up in Kinoko you can set up in. Karl rented it for us, but with Quackity's casino taking off and my chip situation, it wasn't somewhere we intended to live for long. You can take it over instead."

"Thanks," he says quietly, his heart seizing in his chest at the idea of Sapnap living somewhere else. He'd thought the Kinoko place was just a lovenest, that Sapnap was only using it as temporary housing when fucking his boyfriends, but—

Now that's not something he's sure of anymore. He's worrying that there's more there, that Sapnap is leaving him, that he's fucked everything up so much that he's driving his friends, his family, his *soulmates* away. This obsession with Technoblade, the burning hole in his chest that opens a little wider every time he feels massive hands curl around his hips, it's ruining everything. But he won't stop. Can't bring himself to stop, and refuses to lie any longer about what he's actually doing.

His eyes burn with unshed tears as he leans into Sapnap's side and says, "If you get me the coordinates, I can set up my bolthole tomorrow or the day after."

"The day after," George says firmly, standing up and walking around to the other side of the couch, settling against Dream like he belongs there. Has always belonged there. "Tomorrow, we're working on getting this place turned into a safehouse and packing up for the move to Las Nevadas."

He's losing George too, he thinks numbly, but doesn't say anything as he sets his mask down and opens his arms instead, all three of them falling into a pile together. Feeds scroll across his sight, IRCs from the area and data about George's biometrics, the server pushing a schedule of events the Antarctic Empire plans to attend to the forefront of his vision, and Dream swallows hard before actively dismissing all of them. When he shuts his eyes, there's only darkness, and he tangles his fingers in George's hair, in Sapnap's, wishes that he could actually feel it instead of relying on context clues as he pulls their heads against his own.

It isn't until hours later, when George's spine is pressed to his own and Dream is laying, armless, half-curved around Sapnap as he scrolls through his comm, that he asks the question that's been lingering in his thoughts since George said *promise me you'll keep it open*.

"Sapnap," he whispers, voice barely audible in the dim neon glow of their Purgatory apartment, "did I break us?"

Sapnap pauses, then sets his comm down on the crate they've been using as a side table since they moved in. When he rolls and looks up, one muscular thigh pushes up between Dream's,

and his skin is just a few degrees hotter than normal for humans, his mods always leaving him warm. Dream doesn't realize he's been crying until those too-warm fingers brush the tears away, Sapnap's brow furrowed as he stares up into the soft green glow of Dream's eyes.

"You didn't break us, Dream," he says, voice low and serious. It makes his breath catch on a silent sob, something that shudders through them both as George sleeps on.

"You're going to live in the casino," Dream tells him, curling in tighter until his brow is pressed to Sapnap's, tears soaking into his lashes and leaving his vision blurred. "I'm losing you, I'm—I'm losing b-both of you, and I—"

"First of all, shut up," Sapnap says, thumbs swiping over Dream's eyes. "Second of all, we're *all* moving to Las Nevadas, dumbass. You're coming too. Even if you spend nights up in Elysium, even if you spend more time in that bolthole in Kinoko than you spend on the border of Limbo with us, you *live* with *us*. You're ours, Dream."

He sobs again, shaking, wishing he could lift his hands to cup Sapnap's face in return. Even if it's for his own good, even if the bone-deep ache becomes grinding when he wears his arms for too long, he wishes he'd left them on for this night, this conversation, because not being able to touch back is killing him. It's taking all of his fraying self-control to keep quiet enough that George doesn't wake up, and it would be so much easier if he could just muffle himself with black metal.

"Look, whatever stupid thing you have going on with Technoblade, whatever bullshit you get into because you won't ask for help when you need it, none of that matters." Sapnap's eyes are dark, dark, dark, black pools like the void he dropped a glowstick down in the Nether, like the void he was remade in a long time ago. There's slashes of neon green glinting against the glossy whites, but Sapnap meets his eyes and touches his face and for once, Dream doesn't hate the feeling of either.

"It doesn't?" he chokes out, his breath ragged as he tries to get himself under control again.

"It doesn't. You're *our* dumbass, our best friend, our Dream. Nothing is ever going to change that. You can fall in love with the most fucked up tyrants this city's ever seen, and you'll still be our Dreamie. Never fucking forget that." Sapnap's lips brush his cheek, his beard scratchy and both like, and not like, the unnatural softness of Philza's and Technoblade's. "And you'll always have a place with me, okay? Karl and Quackity like you just fine. George would burn the world down for both of us. You are never going to be alone as long as we breathe."

And the server whispers *I love you, I love you, I love you* and he knows it to be true.

"Okay," Dream whispers, shutting his eyes again as Sapnap's hands slide down and wrap around his back instead.

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The bolthole up in Kinoko is over a cafe, run by a girl named Tina. She's got cat mods, ears and a tail, and a smile that lights up the whole room. Dream tries to think of himself as aloof and cool, most of the time, but she worms her way into his heart almost immediately, especially since she doesn't even question the mask. Masks. He wears both, swaps to the

white smiling one when he goes to Elysium, then back into his regular one when he works jobs or heads back into Deep Down. The cafe sits near an access point that makes travel between Midgard and Limbo trivial. Even better, it's an unofficial access point.

He asks the server not to have its operators fix it, and the server, gleeful with the chance to play conspirator, agrees.

Tina doesn't question the masks, or the way he'll slip upstairs to his bolthole with food instead of eating in the cafe with her. Karl and Quackity don't question the fact that he moves his things into George's room the second they finish the transfer over to the casino, Sapnap's stuff getting split evenly between their room and the room he shares with his boyfriends. The access point to Kinoko is maybe a five minute run from Las Nevadas, which is an hour's trip out of the way from the markets of Purgatory and the apartment there now relegated to being just an office space.

It's safer, not conducting business out of the casino. Safer for them, safer for Quackity, safer for the patrons who have no idea that this is the only place in the city that Dream won't kill in. George navigates the upper tiers of Purgatory with ease, so Dream sets that worry aside and makes sure to keep weapons stashed around the area, just in case.

Topside, he won't work the upper levels of Midgard, but there's plenty of contracts in the lower levels too. His black bodysuit and black mask become a sight the enforcers dread, when he deigns to let them see him, because they can't *catch* him and they know there's always a corpse waiting nearby for them instead. It's not the same kind of money as Wilbur's job, but it's good money nonetheless, and now that he's keeping busy with something other than his obsession with Elysium, some of the tension eases out of his friends' expressions. Sapnap can take fewer jobs, with Dream pulling his weight again.

His smiling mask is something the guards at the palace recognize on sight now. It doesn't matter what else he wears; as long as he's wearing *that*, with the access codes embedded in it broadcasting locally to let him through the front doors, no one will question him. He pulls it off before he sees Technoblade and Philza, never leaving it on long enough for them to begin to question it, but it... eases a tension in him, to hide his face from everyone else. To have the *chance* to hide his face from everyone else.

"Pretty boy," Philza calls him, dragging talons through his hair as Dream grimaces and ducks away, always returning seconds later in silent demand for another touch.

"Dollface," Technoblade says fondly, pinning him against the arena floor as Dream bucks up underneath him, legs already spreading the moment the final round is over.

Bright eyes. Sweetcheeks. Handsome. Baby boy. Gorgeous.

The pet names grate, a strip of sandpaper against his soul every time one of them looks at him, looks at his *face*, looks at this fucking thing he's forced to wear with a smile, pretending like he doesn't hate it every second of every day. It's both utterly intolerable and something he can ignore as long as it means they'll keep touching him. He craves Technoblade's broad palm against the small of his back, the drag of knuckles against his skin and the fond curl of his voice, and he can suffer a thousand tiny indignities if it means that Technoblade will keep



fighting him and fucking him, whenever Dream's willpower fades and he finds himself up in Elysium again.

He understands the messy, ugly, adoring thing in his brain that turns to Technoblade like a flower to the sun (the sun! Something he can feel on his skin now, something he never realized existed outside of vids, and maybe it's that Technoblade's laugh is tied up in the wonder of the sky for Dream, and always will be.) It makes sense in its own fucked up way, and with the server encouraging him, he is weak enough to indulge it.

The relationship he has with Philza is... more complicated.

"You know," Philza says one night, when Dream's focus is on the few pinpricks of light burning in the dull orange glow of the night sky, Elysium's lights blocking all the rest of the stars, "you could just call me Phil."

He blinks, blinks again, then finally tears his gaze from the window and turns his attention back to his lovers. Technoblade is a heavy, steady heat against his back, one massive palm curled around Dream's hip as his hair spills across the pillows all three of them share. Phil is shorter than both of them, built with a wiry sort of strength that looks outwardly fragile, but Dream is pretty used to curling around smaller bed partners. He's perfected the way to curl his legs up and hunch his shoulders so he can tuck his head underneath someone else's chin without hanging off the end of the bed.

"What?" he asks belatedly, the words finally registering.

"You can just call me Phil," Philza repeats patiently, talons carding through Dream's hair. They aren't like a bird's claws, nothing like the wicked nails that Dream's seen Tommy wield with his avian mods; under the right lighting, they shimmer with iridescence like an oil slick, like beetle wings. His feathers are all wrong too, paper-thin without any pinions, just hundreds of translucent curved structures, soft to the touch unless he deliberately stiffens them to razor sharpness.

Elytrians are rare, and Dream's beginning to think that they're nothing like avians at all.

"Why would I call you that," he says flatly, the pale plastic of his hand resting on Philza's stomach. His head tips into the touch, the scrape and drag of talons against his scalp, but he doesn't let himself get distracted.

"Mm, well. Philza's a bit formal, isn't it? You can just call him Techno, too." There's a wry smile on Philza—Phil's face, a crinkle at the corner of his blue eyes like Dream's done something funny. He has a mocking air to him at all times, but the longer Dream knows him, the more he thinks that's just how Phil *is*. "We wouldn't mind. Fuck, we'd like it if you got a little less formal."

"No one else calls him that," Dream points out, breath hitching for a moment when Phil's talon hooks behind one ear and drags along the shell.

"No one but me. And you, pretty boy." Phil's smile widens as he repeats the touch, watching as Dream's lips part and he shivers. The pet name stings, the way it always does, *especially* in

Phil's mocking tones, but Dream sets aside his own quiet loathing of it for a moment as the thought occurs to him—

"Why doesn't Technobl—Techno like pet names?" he asks. "He uses them for me all the time, but he told me that's a limit or whatever."

Phil sucks air in through his teeth, blue eyes darting to the slumbering mass behind Dream. He tenses, half turning to look at Techno too, but the piglin hybrid doesn't stir under the weight of their combined gaze. After a moment, Phil's fingers start carding through his hair again and Dream lets himself relax.

"You're unchipped, so you know the Under," Phil says thoughtfully, "but I don't know if you've ever been to the Nether. Techno's from there, fifty years back or so, and there were... different customs then."

"Like what?" Dream is curious, always curious, but now more curious than ever. He's from the Nether too, grew up there, became an admin there, but the city is ever changing and Deep Down changes faster than the rest of it. What he grew up in is likely nothing like what Techno grew up in.

"Mm, well—Midgard used to be six levels, for one. The city's infrastructure was pulled in with the rest of it, until the operators got lazy and the poor got poorer and, eventually, the enforcers came through to block those sections off. Before then, though, it was just the Nether, really, that was a lived in part of the Under. You had people that worked down there, but you didn't have people that *lived* down there."

"And Techno lived down there?" Dream hazards a guess.

"Yep." Phil stops playing with his hair, taking Dream's head and slotting it firmly under his chin instead. He hasn't touched the admin mark on the back of Dream's neck since that first night. "Grew up in a place called the Pit. It was a fighting ring, training up some nasty little assassins as a side gig, and he went back to tear it all down a decade or two later, but *before* then, names were... proof that you made it, I suppose. Only the best fighters got them, and having a name as a Netherborn meant you could nearly walk with the Topsiders, you were that important."

"So he doesn't like pet names because they're disrespectful." Dream huffs out a sigh, shuts his eyes, and forces his body to relax.

"He doesn't like them because it's all he heard, back when he was an object. Since he's a person now, he doesn't like being reminded of that." A finger taps just above his ear, and then Phil says, "You haven't told him you're an admin."

Dream can't help it. He tenses up, because it's dangerous to say that out loud, and even though Phil *knows*, he hates being reminded that someone, anyone, outside of George and Sapnap might find him out. "I'll tell him when I tell him."

There's a faintly disapproving hum. "I won't tell him your secrets, and I won't tell you his, but you *should*. Soon. He deserves to know, pretty boy."

The urge to snap at Phil and tell him to fuck off, to grab his face and scream for him to use Dream's *fucking* name, rises up in him like a flood of white hot rage. Dream battles it down, inch by terrible inch, until his breathing is controlled and he can answer without shouting. "I'll tell him when I tell him, Phil."

Phil hums, again, then lets the subject drop. It's not the first time they've had this argument, and it won't be the last. The orange silence of Elysium's night sky isn't soothing to fall asleep under, not the way the buzz of neon or the rattle of slot machines is, but Dream shuts his eyes pointedly and eventually, darkness takes him anyways.

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"Look at this," Phil murmurs on a different morning, when they haven't had rough conversations and the only aches under Dream's skin are the bruises from Techno's hands holding him up so they can both fuck him. He's sprawled out on the side of the bed closest to the window, Techno's hand dragging down his spine in lazy strokes as Phil dresses in an idle, absentminded sort of way.

When he glances up, Phil's handing Techno a tablet—the one he uses to talk to the server, because he's a freak and that means there's only so much he can get from the connection as an admin—but it doesn't look like something intended for him to see as well. Dream lets his head drop back down to the pillow, the twinge of nerves misfiring in his shoulders enough to keep him from moving much. He's worn his arms for too long again.

"No sound?" Techno asks, the hand on Dream's back slowing, then stopping, as he looks at whatever is on the display.

"She sent the sound to me directly. There weren't mics on the camera, but at least one person there was chipped and she could record from their ears. I'll send you a file of it later." There's an emotion in Phil's voice that's familiar, but Dream struggles to place it as rage until he rolls over and sees the tight anger in Phil's posture. The last time he'd seen anything like that was... huh, probably when he was getting kicked out of their bed, actually.

Dream blinks, then pulls Techno's hand to his chest and asks, "Anything I should know?"

They turn to look at him, the muscle in Techno's jaw jumping as Phil's wings mantle before settling in a slow, reluctant way, forced calm spilling through both of them. Dream's been sharing their bed for almost three months now, but this is the first time he's felt like an outsider. *Truly* like an outsider.

"I'll handle it," Techno says, not to him, before lifting his hand and dragging his thick, blunt fingers over Dream's cheek. "Nothin' for you to worry about, darlin'. Just something to do with the Empire."

He toys with the idea of asking the server to send him whatever is on the tablet, but he lets it go almost immediately. Phil will know if he asks, and for now, Dream doesn't see any reason to pry. But as he shrugs and shifts to press a kiss to Techno's thigh, he can't help but wonder what could possibly get Phil so angry.

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He stands in shadow, all his components dimmed, swords in hand, and waits. This is a job that Sapnap could have handled, but they've run across this gang more than once and Dream is tired of getting hired to pick them off. It's always been a small run here, a quick op there, and the Dream Team cleaning up the mess left behind while getting paid a pittance for it. It's fucking personal now.

"Hey," one of the leaders says, her pointed ears pinning back as she touches the sealed door, "since when does this section of the district lock up?"

With a blink, he shifts his eyes to night vision, keeping his breathing smooth and even. The server arches up under his thoughts like a cat, purring at the attention, before shutting off the lights.

He waits for the murmurs of concern to die off before brightening the LEDs in his arms and displaying across his mask the words, GET FCKD.

Twenty minutes later, the server brings the lights back on, helpfully informing him that it needs maintenance in this sector if he wants it to do more. Learning that Purgatory and Limbo used to be sections of Midgard explains a lot about the server's influence down here, limited as it is, and Dream promises to either check the local relay station or have someone else check it before he sheaths his swords. He doesn't bother to clean up the body parts lying all around the corridor, and he only stops long enough to wipe the blood off his soles before starting to climb up an access ladder.

The comm line in his mask clicks on, and there's an odd note of apprehension in George's voice when he says, "Dream, we have a situation."

"What kind of situation?" He pauses in the maintenance shaft, running one metal palm along the heavy piping that hides the power lines that run through this section of the city. Usually George just tells him things upfront, so he's curious about the hedging now.

"It's..." George's voice falters, and Dream can faintly hear the sound of a slot machine jangling. He's making the call from Las Nevadas? They'd agreed to keep business to the Purgatory apartment.

"Just tell me what's up, George," he says, a little impatiently. "I need to make a choice about which direction to go, so I'd rather not double back because you couldn't get your shit together."

"You need to get to Limbo," George says. "Now."

"Why do I—"

“Technoblade came down the elevator ten minutes ago, and he’s looking for something.”

Dream’s heart stops. They’re not supposed to come down here, Phil and Techno, they’re supposed to stay up in their lofty palace and keep their hands clean. Relatively clean. He knows running the Empire is a bloody, awful business, and that there are more bodies at their feet than even he can claim, but he always thinks of them with the dazzle of Elysium behind his eyes. They’re *Topsiders*, no matter that Techno was born in the Nether.

And Wilbur works out of Limbo. Shit. Fuck.

“I’m going,” he says, turning to sprint down the shaft. This one should connect up with another access ladder in about a hundred yards, and that ladder will take him down to a lower level of Limbo, right around the same height as one of the upper levels of Purgatory. From there it’s just a long run across some of the walkways and through an old transit tunnel before he can reach the main hub at Limbo.

The server asks what he’s doing. Dream tells it that he’s going to find Techno, then queries if it can give him coordinates. It can, and does, displaying them across his vision with a marker that tells him how close he’s getting. It’s a twenty minute run from here to there, and he can only hope that a half hour in the Deep Down won’t get Techno killed—or worse.

Why the fuck is Techno down here? Dream kicks off a wall, picks up slightly more speed as he leaps up the ladder three rungs at a time, heedless of the risk of falling down the access shaft. There isn’t any reason for the Empire to come down here *personally*; of course they sell weapons, they’re the main game in town, but that’s handled through intermediaries, same as the rare earth minerals so vital to half the cybernetics embedded into the skin of the unchipped population down here. As far as he knows, Techno and Phil *don’t* handle the day to day business. Ever.

In the back of his mind, the server begs for reassurance, and absentmindedly, he gives it.

Techno is moving, albeit not nearly as fast as Dream is. Fuck, fuck, fuck, he needs to get there before L’Manburg spots him deep in their territory. When he launches out onto the walkways that cut across the upper layer of this level of Limbo, he has to leap onto the railings to navigate past residents trying to get around, dropping at one point to a ventilation shaft and sprinting down its length rather than trying to cut through the snarl of tradesmen occupying a crossroads. He uses wires to swing across gaps, climbs pipes and rusting building facades to get higher, skids down a roof and takes a flying jump across an empty space that drops down almost a hundred feet, before landing at the entrance to one of the old, unused transit tunnels. The construction never finished, the rails ending at open air and the plunge down to the streets of Limbo.

He scrambles up into it, starts sprinting down the length of the rails with his breath coming in harsh bursts, and watches the marker in his vision tick down the distance. Four hundred yards. Three hundred. Two hundred. One fifty.

The distance reading on the marker vanishes at thirty yards, and Dream slows until his running steps are silent in the echoing darkness of the tunnel. Emergency LEDs provide a dim glow, but it’s not enough to see by without help. He’s too frazzled by the idea of Techno

being hurt to remember the lime green lights in his arms and mask—at least, until a massive shape looms from the darkness, an axe swinging for his neck.

Instinct has him ducking and rolling, rather than lifting his arms to block the blow like he might normally do. It saves his hands, because the axe is pure fucking netherite, gleaming a dull black-purple under the emergency LEDs as Techno's red irises flicker on.

"I've been lookin' for you," he drawls, quiet menace in his voice as he swings the axe again, Dream barely dodging out of the way in time.

WHY? flickers across his mask, displaying for longer than it normally would because Dream needs him to see it and can't stop dodging. Techno is *fast*, faster than he is in the arena, the weight and heft of a real weapon giving him a momentum that holograms can't.

"Heard something interesting the other day. Wanted to see if it was true." A piece of steel railing shears off, netherite cutting through it as easily as paper. Dream puts just enough distance between them that he can draw his swords, and the next strike is caught solidly between the crossed blades that scream under the weight.

They glow, the way the rest of him does, and he's never regretted that choice of aesthetics over utility until this moment.

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT RUMORS, he displays, repeating the message three times as Techno swings for his head again. Trying to communicate while fighting is taking a toll, and he hisses in pain when Techno bears down on him and his ankle twists under the pressure. Fuck it. He can't afford to try and win this fight, he needs to get *away*.

If Techno can't find him, he won't have a reason to stick around.

With that in mind, Dream goes on the offensive. He sees the way Techno's eyes widen slightly in surprise, his sword strikes coming brutally fast as he uses every trick he's learned from their duels to get the advantage. Techno might be winning the fight, but he's working for it every step of the way, and Dream is only trying to rotate him around until—there.

SEE YOU AROUND flickers over his mask, a heart following it despite his best efforts, and he knocks the axe up high, kicks off Techno's chest to build a little speed before turning to sprint back down the way he came. When he darts past a series of pipes, Techno right on his heels, he hears a pressure valve burst and has to duck at the last second to avoid a blast of steam. The sound of hooves against the harsh metal flooring fades as he keeps running, and Dream only dares one glance back over his shoulder, Techno a massive, pale shape hidden by steam, before he focuses on getting out of sight and getting away.

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"Why is he *here*?" he demands, limping in tight circles in the Purgatory apartment as Sapnap makes exasperated noises at him.

"I don't know," George says, voice tight. "I'm *working* on it, Dream."

“Work faster,” he snaps, before coming to a stop and sighing. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry, George, I know you’re doing your best. It’s just—”

“It’s fucked up,” Sapnap says when he can’t continue, and Dream laughs hollowly in agreement.

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“You gotta be careful up there,” Tina tells him as she hands him a small frosted cake. Her white-furred ears are pinned back, and her pretty face is pulled into a frown.

“Why?” he asks, knowing full well what the answer is.

“The Antarctic Empire is on the move,” she says, tail lashing for a moment before she forces herself to calm down. “That’s no good news for *anyone*, Dream. Just promise you’ll be careful?”

“Always am,” he lies, the cake tasting like ash on his tongue.

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“Fuck me, that’s bad for business,” Quackity groans, his feathers puffed out as he kicks his feet up onto the low table in his apartment. All five of them are gathered there, drinks and a card game spread across the gilded surface.

“Tina says that they’ve been questioning people in Midgard,” Karl says, fiddling with his cards and frowning. “She says that everyone in Kinoko is worried.”

WE WILL HANDLE IT, Dream displays, even though his heart is in his throat and he’s not sure he can handle anything.

“Will you?” Quackity asks, before waving it off and turning the conversation to a different topic instead.

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“Is Techno mad at me?” Dream asks, his plastic fingers entwined in Phil’s hair, legs still wrapped around the emperor’s waist.

Phil hums, his mouth hot and wet against Dream’s neck, talons tracing idle designs along the curve of Dream’s ass. His wings block out everything else about the room, and his voice is low when he says, “No, he’s not mad at you. He’s just dealing with something that’s taking more of his attention than usual.”

Dream feels sick. “But he’s okay? He doesn’t hate me?”

“He doesn’t hate you,” Phil hums again, lips curved into a smile. “Neither of us could hate you, pretty boy.”

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He pulls his blade out of the skull of some code jockey who’s been fucking with other people’s implants and just—breathes. In, out, in, out. Killing people isn’t the stress reliever it

should be, because every job he goes on now, he's wondering what Techno is doing. Whether he's putting himself at risk again.

There's been sightings of him as far down as Purgatory, glimpses that never amount to much. Dream hasn't chased him down since that first time, reasoning that it's safer for them both if they don't cross blades again. The anxiety makes him sick with tension though, bad enough that he's started avoiding going up to Elysium because the empty place where Techno *should* be aches like a sore tooth, like an abscess under the skin.

This job, in an out of the way corner of Limbo, had asked for him specifically. He'd hoped that would mean it was a challenge, something to distract him, but the code jockey couldn't break through the protections the server gives its admins, and he'd died pathetically fast. Anticipating some kind of resistance, Dream hadn't bothered to line up another job in the area, and now he's at loose ends.

"Fuck me," he mutters under his breath, before a sixth sense makes him duck and spin away from the netherite blade that slams into the wall where his head was seconds ago. A second knife lands a moment later, and Dream keeps twisting, landing in a defensive crouch with his sword drawn, static fuzzing across the front of his mask as he assesses his attackers. Did the code jockey have friends?

Then he freezes, staring at the two men standing at the other side of this corridor, the roof just low enough to brush against Technoblade's crown, the tops of Philza's wings.

"Told you the tip was good, mate," Phil says, lips curved in that familiar mocking smile. Beside him, Techno just grunts, his own mouth pulled down in a scowl, tusks jutting up as his red eyes glow in the dim light of the corridor.

"George," Dream says, breathless and desperately glad that his mask mutes everything to the outside world, "tell me that you have a confirmed sighting of Philza or Technoblade somewhere in Purgatory."

"...No?" George sounds hesitant. "As far as anyone knows, they're still in the palace. They weren't caught leaving on cameras at any point."

Fuck. Maybe the server hid them, or maybe they have a secret access down to the Deep Down—and wasn't that a horrifying thought?—but either way, he's pretty sure these two are the real deal. Both emperors of the Antarctic Empire, brutal men whose exploits have painted the city's history red with blood, standing in front of him with blades drawn.

"Been lookin' for you again," Techno says, hefting his axe up a little higher as Phil settles his sword into a guard stance. "Our discussion last time got cut a little short, and if you're here to kill me, that seems like somethin' we need to be talking about."

"What?" And then, belatedly, he flashes on his mask, WHAT?

"We saw the video, mate," Phil says, before there's no room for any of them to say anything else. Techno is fast, brutal, swinging where he knows Dream will be in a second, but Phil is faster, his sword a wicked thing that scores across Dream's arms and leaves stinging lines of



pain along his skin. If he lets Techno land a hit, he's dead; if he doesn't stop Phil from cutting him, he's dead anyways, just slower.

It's all Dream can do to keep up, deflecting Phil's sword and ducking away from Techno's axe, on the defensive again but *this* time he can't even use the element of surprise to lash back out. All he has is the uncertain possibility of the server stepping in again, but this section of Limbo is badly in need of repair. Its connections are cut to most of the utilities.

He spins, trying to get out from between the two of them, and catches a glimpse of gold and red out of the corner of his eye. The display on his retinas helpfully tags the name Tommy Innit before the figure is entirely out of sight, and Dream's blood runs cold.

"George," he gasps, "George, who gave us this job?"

"Uh, it came through Sam, from someone named Theseus—"

"George, *what is Tommy's favorite alias?*"

A trap. A fucking trap, of course it is, of *course* Wilbur would set him up like this, using him to lure them both down. He doesn't know Dream is an admin too, but he'd know enough to find a section of the Deep Down that Philza can't utilize. And like a fucking idiot, Dream's played into his hands, his game of avoidance exactly the bait Wilbur needed.

Server, he queries, just barely knocking the axe to the side and taking a shallow slice over his thigh for his efforts, server are there bombs? Have they left anything here?

It can't see. It can't see, and the server panics when it realizes that its most beloved might die right there, without it able to do anything to help. The wail it lets out isn't a sound so much as a *feeling*, code and data scrambling up into a corrupted mess of fear and horror, the server reaching out and screaming its warning as best it can. Dream sees Phil stumble, sees Techno falter and lift a hand to his head.

Dream doesn't hesitate. He drops his sword, grabbing Phil's free hand with one of his own, Techno's with the other, and he twists around, yanking them behind him as he starts running. A few stumbling steps, Techno's noise of outrage, and then they're running with him as he slams the server with queries and requests, hunting for any kind of access point, anything at all.

Here, it tells him desperately, a section of the wall opening up with the grind of oxidized gears and rusted pistons.

The wall slams shut again behind them, but not so quickly that he doesn't feel the heat from the blast, the rumble kicking the ground up under his feet until he nearly falls again. His grip on Phil and Techno is the only thing that keeps him upright, Phil's wings flaring out as Techno plants his hooves. When he twists around to stare, there's a crack in the wall, the mechanisms twisted and distorted by the blast, smoke filling the corridor where they had all been standing moments before.

“Dream!” George’s shouting finally penetrates the fog of fear that shrouds him, and Dream sucks in a sharp breath of air at the sound. “Dream, what *happened*?!”

“Bombs,” he says, swallowing past the dryness in his throat. He hasn’t let go of their hands, even though Techno is trying to free himself. Phil sheathes his sword, then reaches out to stay Techno’s hand when it looks like he might swing the axe into Dream’s arm.

“What do you *mean* bombs? Dream!” He’d laugh at the panic, but he’s still panicking himself. Who knows what other traps Wilbur has laid out for them down here? He can’t afford to let them go. He can’t—

Without thinking about it, deliberately refusing to think about it, he turns away from the broken access point and starts walking, still holding their hands. He thinks Phil may have twined their fingers together, but Techno has to be dragged along, muttering furiously the whole time. It doesn’t matter. He’ll get them to safety, *then* deal with the consequences.

Every time Techno tries to say something, Phil makes a low noise in the back of his throat and he falls silent again. Dream is desperately grateful for it, whatever reason Phil might have, because he can’t talk to them with his mask on and he refuses to take it off down here in the Deep Down, where threats lurk behind every corner. He can protect them as Dream, but Dream exists as words on a screen and a digital smile, not with the garish thing of skin and hair that he wears behind the walls of the palace.

This maintenance tunnel connects with a more public one through a well lit relay room. Dream finally drops their hands in there, then immediately turns and grabs Techno’s jaw, twisting his head this way and that to make sure he’s taken no damage. The looks of sheer offense on his face would be funny under other circumstances, but his shirt is singed and his crown is gone, knocked free by either the blast or the run. Dream isn’t sure which.

“You’re really just gonna let him manhandle you like this?” Techno asks incredulously when Dream turns and Phil is already opening his arms for a full-body inspection. Uninjured, thank fucking god, though the trailing edges of his wings look ragged, the papery not-feathers punched through with holes and singed at the tips.

“I think our silent friend here isn’t planning on killin’ us anymore,” Phil says, his blue eyes steady and assessing. Dream swallows hard, but tips his head in a silent nod of acknowledgement, then looks up at Techno again.

ITS NOT SAFE, he flashes, turning so both of them can read the words. FOLLOW ME.

“Phil—” Techo starts, obviously unhappy, before sighing. He hooks his axe back over his shoulder, flipping his braid over it, then looks to the elytrian standing there watching them both. After a moment, Phil’s lips quirk up, and he folds his wings in tighter somehow, making them smaller and less obvious.

It will have to do. Dream nods at them both again, then turns and starts walking.

As they make their way through one of the main Limbo corridors, Dream is hyperaware of the eyes on them. He’s a notorious figure, sure, but he can usually slip into a crowd without

difficulty anyways. Techno's height makes him obvious though, outsized for the buildings of Deep Down, and his clothes are too obviously fine. At least Phil's haori and bucket hat are innocuous enough, blending into the dark as Dream hunts for an abandoned side corridor to divert them towards instead.

He hooks his fingers in the shape of a black cloak hanging on the back of a street vendor's stall while the man is too distracted by his companions to notice. When they duck around a building towards a set of stairs leading down, he throws it at Techno and flashes, PUT THAT ON.

"Breathe, Techno," Phil murmurs, when it looks like he might go for Dream's throat instead. The piglin hybrid clenches his jaw, nostrils flaring as he glares—and then his red eyes widen, the wide-knuckled grip in the stolen cloak going slack.

He puts it on, after a moment, and the anger eases out of his posture as they start walking forward again. Dream refuses to think about it, leading them down the stairs and to an access point, crossing a walkway that opens into a sluice gate that represents the border of Limbo and Purgatory. He won't bring them to Las Nevadas, where it would put Sapnap's boyfriends at risk, but until he knows how they got down to Limbo, and what Wilbur's plans are, he won't lead them back Topside either.

Wilbur Soot is crazy enough to bomb the whole transportation hub to kill two men. It's one of his few admirable qualities.

They returned the money. He knows that's not the thing truly making him angry, he *knows* that, but his brain is hung up on it anyways. They returned the fucking money, the only return Dream has *ever* had to process since they started this killing business, and Wilbur targeted him anyways. He'd swallowed his pride, done the just thing, done the *correct* thing, and the fucking egomaniac drug dealer had planted bombs under his feet and used him as a lure for the men he might, in some fucked up way, love, and he is—

He is incandescent with rage. He's shaking, by the time he navigates them down the sturdier walkways, eschewing his usual vent travel because Techno is simply too large and heavy to be trusted on them, even reinforced. It adds minutes to their travel time, but not as many minutes as Dream's hands jittering on the window latch of the apartment, the anger suffocating him as he finally yanks it open and drops inside.

It slides shut behind Phil and Techno but he barely registers the noise as he storms into the main room, yanking his mask off, and snarls, "I want him fucking *dead*, George."

"Dre—" George jerks to his feet, cutting himself off as the emperors step into the room behind him. Dream barely notices, already pacing as he yanks his metal fingers through his sweat laden hair, mask laying alone and forlorn on the couch.

"No, he used me as fucking *bait*, used *me* as fucking *bait*, George, this is the last fucking straw—" He stops, sucking in air wildly, teeth bared in a snarl and hands fisting hard enough to yank the fragile blond strands from his scalp. "We returned the fucking money and he *used me*."

“And that’s bad,” George says carefully, watching Phil with wary eyes as Techno slowly leans against the doorframe into the bedroom, “but that doesn’t explain why Philza Minecraft and Technoblade are standing in our living room.”

“You’re the Notfound kid,” Phil says, like it’s a revelation. “The missing one. Huh.”

“I don’t know how many bombs Wilbur has planted around Limbo,” Dream snaps, starting to pace again. “Until I know for a goddamn fact that he won’t nuke the elevators to keep them from going back Topside, I’m not taking that risk.”

“Okay.” George watches him warily now, eyes hidden behind his goggles, but Dream can feel the focus carefully below his face. “Okay, um, well. Maybe you should go get cleaned up, then, and I guess I can fill them in...?”

“Would be nice if someone could,” Techno says dryly, and Dream hisses the air through his teeth in fury before grabbing his mask and storming back to the bathroom, careful not to knock into either of his lovers on the way. Ex-lovers, maybe, since he has no idea if they’re going to leave him over this.

And why shouldn’t they? He’s been lying to them. Clearly, somehow they’ve learned that he was hired to kill Techno, and Dream wants to lay the blame for that at Wilbur’s feet too, but he thinks about the server begging for reassurance, the way it’s gone guiltily quiet now that the danger is over, and he queries, was it you?

If it’s about you, it’s not really private, the server says, and Dream shuts his eyes as he lets his pants drop and slowly unzips his bodysuit. He is so fucking stupid. He’s so unbelievably fucking stupid, and when he meets his eyes in the mirror, they’re red-rimmed and set in a splotchy, unappealing face, anger leaving his cheeks flushed as sweat makes the torn out strands of hair stick to his skin. They won’t stay, and he can’t blame them, because he wouldn’t stay with an ugly fucking liar either.

He stumbles into the shower, lets lukewarm water spill over him as he braces his arms against the wall, and then asks the server to show him what they’re talking about. When they leave him, he wants to know what they say to George to justify it. When they leave him, he wants to know that they’re telling the truth about why.

“—months now,” George is saying, sounding less on edge. “Honestly, I don’t think that he could have slept with you if he *wasn’t* interested, Dream’s not that good at faking it.”

“When was the hit put out?” The server gives him audio, courtesy of the chips all three of them are wearing, and then a grainy video feed in the corner of his vision. It’s from a disorienting angle until Dream realizes that it’s Techno’s eyes he’s looking out of, Phil leaning over George’s chair now as his best friend sits back and gestures at something on his screen.

“Nearly half a year ago, maybe? No, wait, seven months. I think. Maybe a little less. We returned the money after that big party you had, where he got to wear a mask again.”

“Bit risky, being a masked assassin,” Phil says idly, drumming his talons on the back of George’s chair. “What’s to stop someone from stealing it or mocking up a copy?”

George laughs as Dream’s fingers dig into the tile hard enough to make one ceramic square crack right down the center. “Down here? No one is stupid enough to pretend to be him. His mask won’t work without admin privileges anyways, he made it himself to replace the one he wore as a kid.”

“The one he wore as a kid?” Techno asks, his voice low and quiet. Thoughtful, in the way that a train is thoughtful right before it smashes its way through an obstacle on the tracks.

“Yeah, he’s *always* worn a mask. The only place he takes it off is in here—and I guess around you guys, though he didn’t exactly have a choice about that. No one wears them, Topside. We nearly returned the money before he ever went up.”

There’s a dreadful beat of silence, and Dream waits for them to say how fucked up he is, waits for them to say that this is the final straw. Then Techno asks, in that same low voice, “Why is the mask so important?”

“I mean, he hates his face?” George sounds confused. “You must have noticed, right? He can’t stand it when people look at him. It took ages before either of us ever saw it, and the first time Sap—our friend tried to touch him, Dream nearly broke his arm. I dunno, we never questioned it.”

“It’s that serious?” Phil this time, some of the humor dropping. Dream tenses, unbreathing, another tile popping underneath his metal fingers. This is it. This is the moment they decide to leave him.

“And he never told us?” The murmur in Techno’s voice is low enough that it’s probably not a comment anyone else is meant to hear, but Dream can. Tears roll down his face and he can hear every fucking word.

“I can’t tell you why,” George says, voice hesitant. “I mean, I don’t know why he hates his face *or* why he didn’t tell you. I just know that he wears his Topside mask the second he gets to his safehouse in Midgard, and he’s never been outside in Deep Down without his regular mask on. I think most people don’t even realize Dream can talk.”

“Okay.” Phil blows out a sigh, wings rustling as he resettles them. “Okay. When Dream gets out of the shower, he and Techno should go get something for all of us to eat, while you and I get to the bottom of this Wilbur situation.”

“That means stop eavesdropping, Dream,” George calls, voice raised even though it doesn’t need to be. Dream winces, then tells the server to take the feed away, scrubbing his hands viciously through his hair instead. The cuts in his skin sting, but Phil’s sword is sharp enough that most of them are clean edged. He can probably get away with just bandages.

When he leaves the bathroom, he grabs a new set of pants and a long-sleeved shirt, pulling his mask back on last. Three sets of eyes turn to him when he emerges from the bathroom,

then Phil and George go back to looking at his screens while Techno steps away from the wall and tips his head towards the front door.

I CAN GET FOOD ALONE, Dream tells him, fisting his metal fingers in the soft fabric of his shirt hem. The urge to start screaming and never stop is overwhelming.

“We have stuff we need to talk about,” Techno says quietly, resting a hand on Dream’s shoulders. The warmth is welcome against the tension leaving his muscles tight, and Dream sways into it without thinking before shaking his head and stepping forward.

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Purgatory’s markets are as busy and anonymous as ever. Dream moves through the crowds with ease, Techno’s upper half hidden by a cloak that would be ankle-length on a normal person, his bulk pushing through where Dream slides between bodies. They stop at a stall that sells spiced kebabs, and Dream holds up six fingers before pulling out his comm and transferring the money as the vendor starts filling takeaway boxes for them.

The boxes get placed in a cloth bag that he pays extra for, and Techno picks it up without asking. Despite saying that they had stuff to talk about, he’s been dead silent this whole time, something bubbling up underneath that Dream can’t name. He keeps glancing back, seeing tension slowly coiling through Techno’s frame, and he can’t stop himself from tensing in return.

Five minutes from the apartment, Techno catches his arm, pulls him into what passes for a secluded spot in Purgatory, tucked between one of the massive water pipes and the corroding corner of a wall. There’s a pinched, unhappy look on his face as he blocks Dream in, and Dream flashes a question mark

“Pr—darlin’. Was there any part of it that you *liked*?” he asks, and Dream goes still because oh. Oh.

MOST OF IT flickers across his screen, and he rests his hand over Techno’s, the black metal odd looking after so long with white plastic instead. GEORGE TOLD YOU I DID.

“No, he said that he thought you couldn’t fake it,” Techno corrects, his frown deepening, his eyes a dull glow under the shadow of his cowl. “But now I’m hearin’ that you’ve been wishin’ you were wearing a mask the whole time, and I didn’t—neither of us knew, Dream.”

YOU KNOW NOW, he flashes, a horrible sense of desperation bleeding into him. His fingers tighten on Techno’s hand, the screen on his mask glitching for a second as his thoughts race while he tries to figure out how to word this. How to make Techno keep him.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Techno says, and there’s something awful in the expression he’s making. “I don’t want to force you into something you don’t—can’t—want. I don’t know how I’m supposed to—”

Dream grabs his shirt, yanks him closer, his mask flickering at higher and higher refresh rates as he begs, DONT LEAVE ME. DONT LEAVE ME. DONT LEAVE ME.

“Dream—”

He shakes his head, comes up on his toes to knock the smooth surface of his mask against Techno’s face. His breath is coming in great, shuddering gasps, sobs ripping through him that are muted by the mask, and he repeats, DONT LEAVE ME.

“Okay,” Techno says, the hand not holding their food lifting to cup the hard edge of the mask. Dream’s hand comes with it, and he presses Techno’s palm against the metal of his mask, harder and harder, like he might feel the warmth if he just tried hard enough. “No, okay, Dream, it’s okay. We’ll talk about this more back at the apartment. I’m not leaving. It’s okay.”

PLEASE flashes, fast enough that Techno winces, and Dream forcibly gets a hold of himself to shut the screen off entirely. Even his customary smile is too risky to wear right now, when he can barely see through the tears and his body is trembling with the terror of being abandoned. He’s given up everything for them, *everything* for them, and if they leave him now—

If they leave him, he’ll make them be honest about it. None of this ‘I don’t want to hurt you’ shit, he’s going to drag the hideous truth out of them until all of them have to look it in the eye. If he’s not good enough, if the lies and the ugliness hidden deep in his core is too much, then he’ll make them say that. He holds that decision close to his chest as Techno finally pulls away, as they walk back to the apartment and set the food down on the table, while George rolls his chair closer and Phil sits down on the end of the couch.

“I’m leaving once I eat,” George announces, giving him a meaningful look that’s mostly hidden by his goggles. “You three can stay here for the next day cycle, and then we’ll figure out a safe way back up to Elysium tomorrow.”

FINE, Dream flashes, before leaning back, folding his arms across his still-shuddering chest. When all three of them look at him, he swallows down another sob and shrugs. NOT HUNGRY.

Phil hums disapprovingly, and Techno sighs softly, but George just shakes his head and reaches for one of the boxes. It takes him less than ten minutes to declare that he’s done, pulling on his jacket before he heads to the bedroom and climbs out the window. Dream follows him, just to make sure he’s on his way fine, and when he turns back, Phil and Techno are both staring at him expectantly over a box of kebabs that they’ve pointedly left untouched.

He stops in the doorway. After a moment, Phil claps his hands together and says, “Okay, so. It seems like we missed a lot of steps in the getting to know each other phase of this, and we’re going to revisit that now. There’s no way to do this that won’t be awkward—”

“Hell of an understatement, Phil.”

“—so I think we should just go around, round robin style, and introduce ourselves.” He looks between them, Techno’s ears tipped back and Dream standing silently in the doorway with his mask still on, then huffs softly. “You’re not getting out of this one without talking, boys.”

“...No, yeah, that’s probably for the best,” Techno mutters, before patting the couch beside himself. “C’mon, Dream. It will be better if we get it all out in the air.”

If he sits between them, he won’t be able to hold onto his composure. Moving stiffly, Dream sits in the chair that George usually claims instead, curling his legs up under his chin as he wraps his arms around them. The glow of his components keeps flickering in a way he won’t let spread up to his mask.

“Suppose I should go first, then,” Phil says, when Dream makes no motion to take off his mask or send words across the screen. “My name’s Philza Minecraft. I’m an outsider, and the first night I was in the city, she made me an admin.”

Techno jerks, head snapping around to stare at Phil, but he says nothing. Phil ignores the reaction entirely, his blue gaze focused on Dream. “Before then, I was a wanderer. I’ve seen the fields that feed the city, the mountains that our contraptions chew through in automation. I’ve watched the big machines harvest miles and miles in a single hour, so huge that we’re ants in comparison to them. I’ve seen the sun rise, and set, over the oceans no one remembers exists, and I’ve flown under the auroras of the arctic, so high in the sky that I could nearly touch the stars.”

Despite himself, Dream leans forward, enraptured. He’s never heard of an elytrian in the city, always thought they were a myth, and now he knows why: Phil came from beyond the walls, from a world that might as well not exist for the rest of them. No one comes from beyond the walls, just like no one ever leaves, but those wings—

“I’ve seen wonders that no one else in this fuckin’ place can imagine and,” Phil smiles, “none of it compares to the moment I stepped into her server room and she made me hers. That kind of love, it’s impossible to lose. And it kills me every day that I remember I can’t be an admin openly, because it’s worth it to be grounded if it’s for her.”

Then he slams an elbow solidly into Techno’s ribs, eyebrows raised meaningfully. Techno huffs, rubbing at the bridge of his nose, then clears his throat and says, “Uh, okay. Uh. My name’s Technoblade, and I uh, got it in the Pit. I used to be an enforcer for Hypixel before I met Phil, and when he kicked my ass I guess I uh, fell in love? A little bit?”

Phil snorts. Dream blinks, chin propped on his knee, breathing evenly for the first time since seeing the two of them down here, in his territory, rather than up in their lofty palace. There’s a flush on Techno’s cheeks, obvious embarrassment in his posture, but as he drags his palm over his mouth, there’s something else under the nerves too.

“When we decided to do this thing, with the Empire, me and Phil, he took me to that room. The server room. But we timed it poorly and, uh, the whole process was interrupted, so I got—the connection is unstable, set up all wrong. The server can push messages to me by usin’ the local IRCs, but she can’t communicate directly, and I can’t talk back. So, uh, I guess that makes a failed admin.”

Is that true? Dream queries, and the server whispers back, yes.



“I saw... a lot of shit, in the Pit.” The nerves fade, replaced with something hard and grim. “Most of it was bad enough that I don’t want to recount it. And that means I want—I *need*—to know that my partners are safe with me. That no one’s bein’ forced. That I’m doing only what they want me to do. Does that make sense?”

They both look at him as he hunches inwards, and then Dream lifts his hands to his mask and pulls it apart, setting it carefully on the table. He won’t think about the tear streaks on his face or the fact that he has to clean the interior as soon as possible. He won’t think about their eyes on him, or what it means to be perceived.

“My name is Dream,” he says, voice hoarse, staring at the cool black metal of his hands. “When I was... young, I don’t know how old, I n-never had a chip, I fell. There’s a hole, in the, in the Nether. They call it the—”

“Void,” Techno breathes, something like horror in his voice.

Dream nods once, head jerking harshly. “The Void. They call it the Void. I dr-dropped a glowstick in it once and it uh, it never stopped falling. But when *I* fell—when I fell. The server caught me. And it didn’t matter that I was, was, was unwanted, or crippled, or faceless, I was *loved*. It loved me. It loved me more than anyone could ever be loved, and I was—”

His fists clench as he remembers that wonderful, terrifying moment when wires infested his skin and connections were made to his spinal cord, when the city AI found him and claimed him as its own. The server leaves its mark when it builds those connections, then hides the mark from everyone else so they aren’t found—but it hurts. Fuck, does it hurt, before the love pours in.

He breathes in, then says, “I wasn’t the only one. I saw another kid my age with an admin mark, but he was—he was stupid. He got caught. They beat him to death, and then killed four more kids d-dumb enough to brag about it. I was already—with my, my mask—I was already suspicious, so I never let anyone know. Until George. And Sapnap. Until them, I was, I was fucking *perfect* at hiding.”

“Fuck, pretty boy,” Phil whispers, before wincing when he realizes what he said. “I didn’t mean—”

“It’s not about being pretty.” His voice is harsh, raw, tears starting to roll down his cheeks again. “It’s not about the, the, the *ugliness* that I know is there. I know what I fucking look like. I know that I’m—”

“You’re not,” Techno tries to say, before Dream raises his voice.

“I *know* what I *look like*, Techno. And I hate it. It doesn’t matter what you think, what y-you like about it, I hate it. I can’t fucking, I see it in a mirror and I want to claw my skin off, I get reminded that people are *looking at me* and I want to kill them, and when you call me that, it’s a fucking joke.” He sucks in a breath that rips up his aching throat, and snarls, “*But I don’t care if it means you keep touching me.*”

Silence, from across the table. Then Techno stands, hooves heavy on the barely carpeted floor, and crouches next to Dream's chair, sliding a palm over his thigh as the other reaches for Dream's hand. Phil moves on his other side, talons drifting into Dream's hair as he shuts his eyes and fights to find his center.

"As long as you keep touching me, it's fine," he repeats, swallowing hard. "I fucking remade myself for you, for both of you, the way I did for the server, the way I did for George and Sapnap, and it was worth it if you keep touching me. I told George to give the money back because I didn't need an excuse to go Topside anymore, couldn't *lie* to myself anymore, even though it was ruining me, even though it could get us killed, because *you were worth it*."

"We are *not* leaving," Techno says, his deep voice the gentlest that Dream has ever heard. "We can talk about ways to make you more comfortable goin' forward, and we can talk about, uh, some of the more fucked up ideas you've got about relationships, but we are not leaving."

"You're ours now, Dream," Phil agrees, his palm cupping the base of Dream's skull where a headache is threatening. "We aren't giving you up just yet."

He breathes, forehead pressed to his knee, his fingers curled in the massive cage of Techno's hand. Forces air into his lungs, then back out again. Reaches his other hand up, fingers unfeeling, and sighs when Phil's fragile touch slides over the black metal of his palm and settles there.

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Eventually, he eats. Even more eventually, he coaxes Techno and Phil out of their clothes, eyeballing the bed—barely big enough for three people Phil's size, certainly not big enough to include Techno—before declaring that they could sleep on the floor. He's vetoed, and they drag the couch into the bedroom instead, shoving it up against the bed to add just a little more room.

Techno keeps treating him like he's made of glass, gentle touches and careful avoidance of his face. The part of Dream that appreciates the latter froths with outrage at the former, and he bounces wildly between the two emotions until they've laid out the sheets and pillows the best they can for three people.

"Hey," he says, catching Techno's hand and pressing it to his shoulder. "Can you do something for me?"

"What do you need?" Techno asks, solicitous and helpful, his fingers already curving around the joint. Dream guides his hand down, sets his fingers just so, then presses them into the

hidden latches that secure the arm to his body. It drops, and Techno makes a high, startled noise as he catches it before it can slam into the floor.

“Now do the other one,” Dream says, turning to present his arm. Techno stares at him like he’s crazy, slowly setting the first arm down before reaching out to touch his chest. “They’re not made of glass, Techno. Just pop it off.”

“But they’re your arms,” Techno says, fingers curling into the right positions even as worry etches its way across his expression. “Don’t you need those...?”

“Yeah, but not all the time. Right now, I don’t need them. Wearing them hurts if I do it for too long, and I was planning on taking them off tonight.” He shifts his weight, puts himself in a position to stare directly into Techno’s eyes even as he tries to glide his gaze off Dream’s face.

“I’ve never seen you take ‘em off before.” After a second longer of hesitation, Techno presses down, and slowly sets the arm down next to the first. Dream stands there, armless, head tipped as he sidles sideways again to force Techno to look at him. “Dream, I am tryin’ to be respectful—”

“Stop it,” Dream says, flat and clipped. From the bed, Phil’s head snaps up, his wings mantling as Techno stiffens. “I’m not fragile. I’m not weak. I’m not helpless. Stop treating me like all three of those things when I have fucking fought you and *won*, Technoblade. I fought you and won.”

“I’m not—” Techno tries to protest, though the guilt in his eyes is damning.

“You are,” Dream says, stepping forward and locking eyes with him, pushing his face into Techno’s in an echo of how they met so many months ago. “Do you know what it means, for me to take my arms off around someone? It means that I’m safe. That they’re safe. I feel *safe* with you, because you fucking respect me enough to fuck me, and you’re damn well going to continue acting like it.”

“Got you there, mate,” Phil says, shifting to sit up with his legs crossed at the edge of the bed. He makes no move to intervene, and Techno’s eyes dart between the two of them before his shoulders slump in something like resignation.

“I respect you.” Techno’s voice is soft as he lifts a hand and cups it around Dream’s cheek. His fingers tremble invisibly, the barest tremor that Dream can feel against the soft skin at his temple, and the look in Techno’s eyes is like the one he’d worn in the alleyway. Conflicted longing warring with a despairing sense of duty. “I respect you, but Dream, you threw a curveball at me and I—I gotta do some processin’ here.”

“Or you could fuck me,” Dream says, tipping his head into Techno’s touch despite the way it makes his skin crawl.

Techno’s breath catches, his lips twisting before flattening out, tusks digging into his skin as the muscle in his jaw goes tight. There’s genuine regret in his voice when he says, “I can’t, Dream. Not tonight.”

He wants to *scream*, but before he can give into the stupid urge, Dream feels talons drag up his spine before settling just under the nape of his neck. There's the soft rustle of feathers over sheets as Phil stands, and then the warm pressure of his chest as he plasters himself to Dream's back, standing on his toes to hook his chin on Dream's shoulder as his wings curve around all three of them.

"Thankfully, I am not Techno and therefore have no morals," Phil says dryly, his lips curved into a smirk when he kisses the cheek that Techno isn't touching. "So if you want someone to fuck you, I'm willing and available."

And he—hesitates. Because Techno is looking at him (looking *at* him, finally, and it's the most awful thing Dream's ever put himself through, but it's better than Techno avoiding him entirely) with a quiet kind of fear that Dream doesn't want to make worse. Even if he wants to push, wants to let his temper fly and drag Techno down to his level, wants to throw him across the too-small bed and ride him until they're both crying, wants to push until they both break, he won't do that. Can't do that. Not when it means crushing Techno's already bruised and fragile trust.

"Fine," Dream mutters, leaning back into Phil's arms and letting his gaze drop. "You don't have to join in but don't—please don't—"

*Leave*, he wants to say but can't, the word sticking in his throat. Techno seems to get it anyways, his fingers drifting down from Dream's jaw to his neck, his collarbone, trailing over the muscle in his chest before finally pulling away as Techno takes a step back and settles again. He makes no move to head for the door, and Dream lets out a ragged sigh as Phil's talons trace the edges of his hips.

"You know," Phil says, voice thoughtful, "you could always suck him off."

"Phil, I don't—"

"If he won't fuck me then why would he—"

"Not you," he tells Dream, before turning that burning blue gaze to Techno. "You don't want to fuck him 'cuz you're afraid of hurting him, yeah? Then don't fuck him. I've got that part handled. But a little birdie told me that Dream likes riding that tongue of yours almost as much as he likes our cocks, so I don't see why you can't put your mouth to work."

Techno stares at him, at both of them, his pale skin going ruddy as he flushes. His eyes flick down, then up, then down again, the glowing ring around his irises flickering, and Dream feels a thrill shoot up his spine when he realizes that Techno is *actually considering it*. He holds his breath, not daring to open his mouth and say something that might make Techno change his mind, and stares back when Techno's eyes finally meet his own.

"Is that what you want?" Techno asks, his deep voice soft and uncertain.

"I want you on your fucking knees," Dream says, his own voice husky with lust.

“I’m not doing this standing up,” Phil mutters as they stare each other down, and then Dream is falling back onto the bed with him, a controlled tumble that leaves his legs spread wide over Phil’s thighs. This time, there’s no need to pin his arms; Phil simply hauls his hips back, grinding his half-hard cock between Dream’s cheeks as Dream forces himself to arch and stay upright without the aid of any hands.

There is a thud as Techno falls to his knees, shuffling forward carefully until he can press his broad palms over the cool skin of Dream’s thighs. His touch burns like fire, making Dream’s breath catch in his chest, coming out as a low moan when Techno’s fingers trail over the sensitive skin of his inner thighs. The fire spills through him, flooding his bones and burning through his gut, until he’s slick and trembling just from a few touches and the *anticipation* of more. He’d feel like an idiot for getting this excited over a set of hands and a dick nowhere near his cunt, but there’s a reason why he’s so well-trained now.

Behind him, Phil makes an appreciative noise, and then Dream gets the oddest sight as black-taloned hands reach out and card through Techno’s unbound hair from under the stumps where his prosthetics would normally sit. They aren’t his hands, would never be his hands, but his stomach flips at the sight of them coaxing Techno forward the way Dream wishes he could.

“Fuck,” he whispers.

Humming softly in agreement, Phil presses an open-mouthed kiss to his shoulder as Techno’s lips find the taut muscle of his stomach. Phil’s hands pull free from the sea of pink, shifting to Dream’s hips, and then Techno is helping to lift him as well as they both maneuver him around so Phil’s cock can slip into his wet, eager hole.

Phil isn’t as mind-numbingly large as Techno is, but he’s still thick enough that Dream moans at the stretch, hips rolling in the cage of hands as he’s slowly lowered. When Phil bottoms out, it’s with a low groan of his own, and then Techno’s mouth is moving against Dream’s skin again as Phil curls his fingers over Dream’s hips and starts to rock into him, slow and lazy.

“Stop touching me and start touching him,” Dream orders, letting his head fall back against Phil’s shoulder as he arches under Techno’s lips. The slow thrusts are driving him mad, stoking the fire inside him without bringing much relief, and his cock *aches* with a need to be touched. Behind him, Phil chuckles, but he moves one hand and buries it in Techno’s hair again, forcing him to look up.

Dream stares down at him through his lashes, at the ruddy flush on Techno’s cheeks and the way his lips glisten with spit. His broad shoulders force Dream’s legs wide, and while he’s had Techno on his knees before, this time is different. There’s something in the submissive curve of his spine, in the way his red eyes hunt for approval, that makes Dream want to watch him *beg*.

“Pretty, isn’t he?” Phil says, his talons teasing through the pink strands as Techno heeds the encouragement and starts trailing his lips lower. His hands are still splayed across Dream’s thighs, but his grip turns worshipful as his mouth gets closer and closer to Dream’s cock. “You should fuck him, sometime. I’d love to watch.”

“Fuck,” Dream says, a shudder rolling through him as Phil’s cock drags against his insides and Techno’s lips wrap around his dick. “Fuck. *Fuck*. That’s—yeah, we’re doing that.”

Techno groans, the sound vibrating through Dream and making his hips jolt. That clever tongue of his is rubbing, curling around Dream’s cockhead, dragging down the length of it as Techno sucks him off, and Dream can’t help the way he starts rocking into it, trying to match the rhythm of Phil’s thrusts and Techno’s tongue at the same time. The heat building in his bones is worse than ever, fire and tension run through him like a wire from the forge, bright and brilliant and fucking dangerous to touch.

He shifts as Phil pushes Techno’s head harder between his legs, until Dream can feel the tusks digging into his skin and Techno’s muted noises of longing are muffled in his skin. He can’t do much in this position, without his hands, but when he demands, “*Harder*,” both men respond immediately.

“Don’t get cocky,” Phil murmurs, low enough that Techno’s ears don’t even twitch. “Order him around all you like, but I don’t take kindly to it.”

“Gotcha,” Dream gasps, unable to manage anything better in response because Techno is sucking his dick with *intent* now, brow furrowed in concentration as he focuses entirely on getting Dream off. It’s intoxicating, seeing him like that—he’s had Techno a hundred different ways, but he finally gets to see the way *Phil* gets him and he wants it. Not every time, maybe, but now, and in the future—

He likes Techno on his knees. He likes Techno so focused on sucking cock that he hasn’t even tried to touch himself. He fucking loves the feeling of Phil’s hips slapping into his ass as Techno hefts him up by the thighs and makes it easier to pound into him, and Dream moans brokenly as he feels the pleasure building until it’s very nearly pain.

“God, fuck, I’m gonna—” He chokes the words out, then makes the mistake of looking down. The sight of Techno’s flushed face buried between his thighs, Phil’s fingers twisting his hair up until it’s fisted in a tight grip that Dream could never get away with, is what sends him over the edge, moaning like a whore as he clenches down on the cock fucking up into him.

“That’s what I love to hear,” Phil says with a soft, wild laugh, his teeth sinking into Dream’s shoulder as his hips snap up harder. Dream is still riding that wave of ecstasy when he feels Phil fall out of rhythm, and he can’t help a gasping laugh of his own when Phil slams into him one last time and *groans*.

The mouth on his cock hasn’t let up. Dream’s thighs twitch and tremble, his breath coming in broken, hitching gasps as he shudders under Techno’s mouth and feels Phil spilling into him. He needs to tell Techno to stop, that he’s fine now, but he can’t force the words out of his mouth when he’s already grinding eagerly into the hot drag of his tongue instead.

“Hey, Dream,” Phil murmurs, his breath hot against Dream’s neck and his voice rough, “how d’you feel about him eating my cum out of you while I choke you?”

“H-holy shit,” Dream says, hips jerking as Techno moans loud enough to make it clear he *can* hear Phil’s filthy whispers. “Yes, fuh—hah—*please*.”

“You heard him,” Phil says, the words not directed at him this time, his fingers untangling from Techno’s hair as they both work to heft Dream up. The idea of having those talons around his throat is hotter than it has any right to be, and while he can’t stop a soft whine at the feeling of Phil pulling out, he isn’t complaining for long. Not when Techno’s mouth is on him again the second he’s set down, tongue dipping between his slick folds until it can find Dream’s hole where it flutters eagerly under the barest brush of its hot, wet tip.

Phil’s talons trace up his chest, teasing at the soft skin at the dip of his clavicle before his fingers curl around the lean column of his throat. His legs are dragged forward, hooked over Techno’s shoulders as the other man groans into his cunt and thrusts his tongue into the mess Phil’s made inside him, and Dream can’t help but moan before Phil’s fingers tighten and cut off the sound. Not for long, though. His grip eases again after only seconds, Dream sucking in a breath of air before he loses the chance again.

“Oh,” he wheezes, tears springing to his eyes as Techno’s fingers dig in hard enough to leave bruises smeared up his thighs. And then he’s cut off again, hips rocking down into wet heat fucking up into his eagerly clenching hole as his lips part soundlessly on an attempt to gasp for air.

His vision is just starting to fade at the edge, all the data on his retinas gone so he can focus on just being *here*, when Phil’s tight hold on his throat slackens. The first breath of air is so sweet that it rushes through him like lightning, his body jerking as the tears spill over and adrenaline makes him shake. Techno’s mouth is relentless, his tusks dragging and scraping against Dream’s skin as his tongue plunges into him and Phil’s other hand brushes just out of reach of his still swollen cock.

“I know you don’t like to hear it,” Phil murmurs in his ear as his fingers lock bruisingly tight around Dream’s throat, “but you’re both my beautiful fuckin’ boys. A man could live forever just looking at the two of you, being so good for me.”

Techno makes a noise that might almost be a sob, a shudder rolling through him. Dream would say something, but he can’t even think with the ringing in his ears and the darkness creeping in, spine arched as the electricity builds and he—

Phil lets go. Dream’s hips snap, legs locking around Techno’s head and keeping him right where he is, and he sobs helplessly as he comes again.

“S—” His voice falters as he tries to turn his brain back on, jerking under the feel of Techno’s tongue still inside him. “S—stop, Techno, fuck. *Fuck*.”

There’s a shuddering, longing noise from between his thighs, but Techno stops and slowly, slowly pulls his face away. His red eyes are glazed over, lips glistening and Dream’s slick smeared over his beard. It’s the most incredible thing he’s ever seen and Dream can almost forgive Phil for calling him beautiful, knowing that he was thinking of Techno like *this* the whole time.

“You did good, Techno,” Phil says, easing his hand away from Dream’s throat and splaying his fingers across the muscle in his stomach instead. “So fucking good for us both.”

“So fucking good,” Dream echoes, watching as the flush on Techno’s cheeks deepen and his eyes slip shut. He makes no move to touch himself and Dream doesn’t bother to offer—he just watches as Phil’s hands card through Techno’s hair and Techno rests his cheek against Dream’s stomach as he catches his breath.

Those aren’t his hands buried in Techno’s hair, but that doesn’t matter. Techno’s arms slowly curl around him, around Phil, pulling them close as they croon tender nothings just slightly out of sync, and nothing matters but the feeling of Techno’s weight between his thighs and the curve of Phil’s chest against his back.

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Phil helps him put his arms back on in the morning, his slender hands more agile than Techno’s and better able to slot everything in its correct place. Dream leans into the touch of Phil’s callused palm pressing into his shoulder, then shuts his eyes and sighs when Techno chases the lingering warmth with his lips, tusks digging into the bone of his shoulder blade. Something shifted in their relationship last night, when he’d taken charge and forced them to dance to his tune, and he thinks they might be better for it.

“I’d rather not show you the entrance to our access from down here,” Phil says as Dream cooks breakfast for all three of them and relishes the chance to actually use his fucking kitchen for once. “Don’t want anyone to follow, you know?”

“If George gives us the all clear, we can head up through Midgard via Kinoko,” Dream tells them with a shrug before flipping the synth bacon in the pan.

“Kinoko?”

“Fourth level district,” Techno says from his spot on the floor where he’s inspecting their weapons for any damage. Dream’s missing a sword, but it isn’t his only one, and the whisper-soft glide of a polishing rag over a blade is a soothing counterpoint to the crackle of cooking meat. “A lot of reds and whites. Thriving black market for mushrooms, if you can believe it.”

“Explains the name,” Phil mutters, before taking the offered plate from Dream and going to sit down.

He brings over Techno’s plate a few minutes later, kicking his feet up on the low table as he lounges back against the couch. It’s strangely domestic, this tableau, and he realizes that he’s never had breakfast with the two of them. Every time he sleeps up in Elysium, he makes sure to leave the palace before the day has truly started.

He wants this, Dream thinks. He wants to fall asleep with them and wake up with them, wants to eat meals and listen in on business, wants to talk about the inane bullshit he’s kept under wraps before now. He wants to finish a job and hang out with his best friends, then come up to sleep between Phil and Techno without worrying whether or not they’re going to figure out the lies he’s been telling them.



The server drags against his mind like a cat, winding around his mental ankles, and he tells it, okay, maybe you did alright this time.

“You can't come down here again,” Dream says eventually, as their plates slowly clear and Phil starts doing dishes. “Not until we’ve gotten Wilbur to back off, at the *very* least. Every time you come down, you paint a target the size of a district on whatever spot of Deep Down you're noticed in.”

“I’m not about to just sit around and twiddle my thumbs waitin’ for him to come kill me,” Techno grunts, passing Dream’s sword up to him. He folds it into his arm sheath then huffs.

“I’m not saying that. I’m saying that you need to let my team take the lead on this, and once we’ve got the mark lined up, we can all strike at once.”

“It's weird, hearing you talk about business so casually,” Phil says, drying his hands off before coming over to retrieve his sword from Techno. “Here we were, doing our best to hide the nastier parts of running the Empire—”

“—while still kicking your ass routinely—”

“—and it turns out we never should have bothered.” Phil gives him one of his sly smiles, gaze lingering briefly on the bruises around Dream’s throat, then looks away. “We looked you up, you know. Back when the server first sent us the video.”

“And the name Dream Team didn't alarm you at all?” Dream asks, offering Techno a hand as he hefts himself up off the floor.

“Why would it?” Techno's fingers tighten around his own for a second, before he lifts Dream’s hand and presses a kiss he can't feel to the metal joints at his knuckles. The brush of warm breath over the glowing components under the plating sends a shiver down Dream’s spine, the sensation utterly alien to anything flesh can feel but still intense.

“We thought you were some trumped up kid out of the upper layers of Purgatory, desperate to make his mark on the world,” Phil says, running his fingers through Dream’s hair as he leans into Techno's touch. “You're not the only kid saddled with a name full of hope and a future that isn't.”

“Probably should have realized why you were so good at fighting in the arena, though,” Techno admits, finally letting his hand drop.

“I’m not sure if I’m supposed to feel complimented or insulted,” Dream says, before the server pings him and lets him know that George wants to talk to him. He hums softly, then bends down to pick up his mask, pulling it on and dragging both Techno and Phil into their comms channel before pinging George back.

“Purgatory and Limbo are clear,” George says without preamble. “We didn't bother to check any lower, since those are the only two sections that connect with Midgard.”

“Hi George, it's lovely to talk to you George, wonderful weather we're having George, and how is *your* day going?” Dream asked, his voice saccharine. He could see Phil shaking his head with a smile, hear Techno snorting softly beside him.

“My best friend nearly got himself killed yesterday, I'm doing *great*,” George tells him, heavy with sarcasm. “What's your exit point? I'll have Sapnap do another sweep before you get there.”

“We're going up through Kinoko, so just past the casino.” He bends down, grabbing his jacket and hauling it on, the smile on his mask flickering to a heart for a moment when Techno rests a hand against his shoulders to keep him from overbalancing.

“Quackity is going to love that. Don't get spotted.”

“What do you take me for?” He jerks his chin towards the bedroom, a silent command for the two emperors to follow. The furniture is all back in place, like last night had never happened, but things are different between them now. He can feel it in his bones.

They won't be coming back to this safehouse, but selfishly, he's glad he got to have them even once in the place that will always be home.

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Tina stares. Her lips part, soundlessly mouthing a question, then shut before she manages to say anything. Dream gives her about ten more seconds to try, then rests a hand on her shoulder and displays, JUST A SEC.

“Okay,” she says weakly, her eyes locked on the sight of the infamous Philza Minecraft and Technoblade bending over to offer gentle fingers to the cats sniffing at them.

His little bolthole isn't much better than the Purgatory apartment, too many of his things scattered across three—four, if he includes the palace—bedrooms. He sets his mask down, worms his way out of his clothes, then digs up his plastic arms and replaces one, then the other. His fingers hesitate on the smiling mask, because he's never worn it around them since the masquerade, but...

His jaw firms, and he pulls it on before looking for a clean shirt to wear Topside.

Phil's eyebrows lift when he comes back downstairs, but Techno is the one to look him in the painted on eyes and sigh. “That thing is so disconcertin' to look at.”

“Cope,” Dream tells him, before buying some pastries for the trip up.

They leave through the back way, up an old fire escape and across maintenance walkways. Techno leaves his cloak behind at Tina's cafe, and Phil stops pulling his wings in tight, but they're far enough away from the crowds that no one recognizes them, not with the route Dream is taking. Going unseen is second nature for him, even if he's having to cart two of the most identifiable men in the city around with him.

They're two levels below Elysium when he's forced to get back down on ground level streets, and that's the point where Phil takes over, moving in front of him and striding along without a single care in the world. Dream falls back, checking his stride until he's side by side with Techno, and watches in fascination as people realize that gods walk among them. He's seen the way Phil is treated at parties, noticed the fawning wariness that follows Techno around Elysium, but this is the first time he gets to see them *outside* of that context.

It is both like, and unlike, the way they're treated in Elysium. There, people are too aware of the power dynamic and the fact that the Antarctic Empire can make their lives living hell; the only conglomerates even close to their power are Noxcrow and Hypixel, and that's a power spread across a much broader board of directors. It means that every interaction with either of them is groveling tinged with fear, an overwhelming desire to appeal to the two men who could make—or break—anyone they chose.

But in Midgard, the people can't do anything about the ones in power. They've learned to keep their heads down and do the jobs in front of them, learned to carve out their lives in the clean, well-lit corridors of the city, no matter which monsters are in charge. It means that when people stare at Phil, it's as much for the oddity of his massive wings as it is for the power he wields, that when they step out of Techno's way, it's entirely because of his size and almost not at all because of his reputation. And the most interesting part is how it makes both of them relax. Dream hasn't seen Techno this at ease outside of the palace in... ever.

He reaches a hand out, brushing his fingers against Techno's. Without hesitation, Techno reaches back, hooking their pinkies together as they follow in Phil's wake.

On the top level of Midgard, Phil turns left where Dream has always turned right. He makes a noise of surprise, and both of them stop to look at him, Techno's red eyes glowing and Phil's blue eyes in shadow under the brim of his hat. This level of Midgard is the brightest of all of them, the closest to real sunlight anyone outside of Elysium can get, and it makes them both look slightly unreal. Under the white glow, the soot stains and dried blood from the fight in Limbo look worse than ever, marring the subtle perfection of their clothes.

"This path takes us straight to the transpo hub, mate," Phil says, head tipped slightly like he's examining an interesting bug. It makes Dream bristle, but that's just how Phil is, and he grinds that instinctive response down as his mask remains blank.

"There's another elevator, one that lets out about five minutes from the palace," Dream says, tipping his head in return. "Do you want me to show it to you?"

Techno and Phil exchange glances, then Phil shrugs and falls back—not to Techno's other side, which Dream was expecting, but to *his*, reaching his hand out to lace his fingers with Dream's plastic ones. For a moment, he struggles to breathe, his hands twitching in their combined grips, a longing to feel the warmth slamming into his chest so hard that his lungs refuse to expand.

Then he swallows, forces the feeling down, and says in a rough voice, "It's this way."

This section of Midgard has the movers and shakers, the people that would live in Elysium if they had the money or the connections to make the leap. Since they don't, they settle for

being as close to heaven as they possibly can, and it means that Phil and Techno pull on the subtle mantles of authority as they follow Dream through the crowds. He sees startled looks directed his way, but no one is stupid enough to comment on the fact that the most feared men in the city are holding his hands like teenagers on their first date.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Phil murmurs when they reach the elevator. “She never told me about this.”

“It didn’t tell me either,” Dream feels compelled to point out, disliking the idea that the server might play favorites. It never has, and it never will, flooding his mind with a tender fondness that makes him smile involuntarily. “George used this elevator when he ran from home.”

“Been meaning to ask about that one,” Techno rumbles as they crowd into it, neither releasing Dream’s hand so he can punch the button to take them up. Techno does it instead, his massive finger dwarfing the delicate machinery of the panel.

“Yeah, how’d you end up with the Notfound heir in your assassin team?” There’s nothing but idle curiosity in Phil’s voice, but Dream finds himself tensing anyways. They wouldn’t tell anyone—he knows that—but hiding George from the people hunting for him has been second nature to them for years, ever since he stumbled into Purgatory with nothing but the clothes on his back, looking for two boys he’d never met in person.

“He’s a freak,” Dream says, the ride up smooth enough that his stomach only drops a little as they head up. “Like you, Phil. But he’s also colorblind, and everyone in the Notfound family has gotten cosmetic surgery for the last couple decades—it’s expected. When he refused they were—the plan was for them—they wanted to *change* him. So he came to us instead.”

“Smart kid,” Phil murmurs, and the elevator doors open up and drop them in the alleyway that Dream knows as well as every street in Purgatory.

“The smartest,” Dream agrees, before falling silent as they make their way to the palace. They hold his hands all the way to the gates, and the only reason why they let go is because Phil needs to take a stack of paper files—a fucking novelty, in the city, where paper is a precious resource—from a passing aide.

He doesn’t break off to head for his office like he usually might, though. He follows Dream and Techno back to the bedroom, sighing in relief the moment the door shuts behind him and he can start shucking his haori off. Techno lets out an answering groan, undoing the ties in his hasty braid and scrubbing his hands through his hair. Dream watches for a moment, then reaches forward and starts working on Techno’s buttons, smoothing his plastic palms over the dirty silk of Techno’s shirt with a hidden smile.

“I’m gonna shower,” Phil says, twisting as he dumps his clothes on the ground. The admin mark between his shoulder blades is dark and well hidden, the scarring and blackened circuitry fading into the chitinous base of his wings. “You coming with, Techno?”

“Gimme a minute.” Techno makes no move to take over the task of getting his shirt off, simply running his fingers through his hair until it falls in pink curtains around his face, the soft strands brushing Dream’s shoulders and back as Techno leans forward and sighs.

Dream looks up at him, memorizing the weary curve of his tusked smile, the hard line of his jaw gone fuzzy with stubble, the gentle red glow of his eyes in shadow. He finishes undoing the last button, then raises his hands up towards his mask, old habits warring against his instinctive loathing. Techno catches his fingers before they can reach the clasp, his muscular frame curving around Dream's as he hunches even closer in.

"You don't have to," he says, deep voice gentle. "You don't have to prove anything, Dream. I get it. So you can leave it on, and I won't treat you like you're breakable. Deal?"

His breath stills, and Dream swallows. This isn't the wary pity from last night, the guilt and self-recrimination that he can't fucking stand. This is just Techno looking down at him, tenderness in his expression as he pulls Dream's unfeeling fingers to his lips.

"Yeah, alright," Dream whispers, making no move to take his mask off again. "Deal."

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Deep in the palace, in a section only accessible to Phil and Techno—and Dream, now, though Phil mentions absently that the server would have given him access anyways—there's an elevator shaft. Most of the elevators in the city go up one level, maybe two; it's a design feature, not a flaw, because each level is between a hundred fifty and two hundred feet tall, and there's genuine concerns with the stability of the shaft if they extend too far beyond that. Support beams, ventilation shafts, pipes for water and to hold the wiring for electricity and network access—the city is a complicated beast to run, so the trade off is a little extra travel time for everyone else.

But not Phil and Techno. This shaft punches straight down, through Midgard, down to Purgatory, down further still to the Nether where it lays at the very bottom of the Deep Down. All of the exits are hidden, tucked away in maintenance rooms that are blocked off to everyone but admins, even to the operators that theoretically run the city. It's not on any plans, not that plans mean much after the years of additions and unregistered construction on every level of the city, and it's a secret that Phil is loath to let slip.

It explains how they showed up in Purgatory without appearing on the cameras, at least.

"And it goes both ways?" Dream asks, standing in the dark little room and staring at the deceptively simple machine that grants untold freedom of movement throughout the city.

"It goes both ways," Phil confirms, before showing him which buttons correspond to which levels.

His four hour trips, to and from Elysium, are a thing of the past. Dream is far better at hiding his movement through the city than Phil and Techno, and he has no shame about using the elevator as he likes. Being able to get back to Las Nevadas or Kinoko in less than a half hour is a godsend, and more importantly, it means he can keep an eye on Wilbur's movements in the Deep Down while still sleeping in the palace every night.

Almost every night, at any rate. George says nothing when Dream starts spending more time Topside, but he always seems relieved when Dream sets aside a night or two each week to curl up in bed together, Sapnap crawling in between them more often than not.

He has not been forgiven for dragging the Antarctic Empire right past the doors of the casino, not really, but Quackity begrudgingly acknowledges that he didn't have much of a choice. While George scours the network for any sign of L'manburg's movement, Quackity takes a more hands on approach, weaving between patrons on the casino floor and keeping his ears out for any hint of the next attack. Sapnap does the same from the streets, Karl in tow about half the time when he needs a face that won't be instantly recognized as a member of the Dream Team, and Dream—

The server croons in the back of his mind as he backflips off service walkways, trots across vents and cartwheels along power lines. He moves through the Deep Down as easily as he breathes, running his hands along walls to feel the hum of power underneath them, resting on his haunches as he watches people move around on the streets far below. The apartment Wilbur gave them the job in is empty, unused, but Dream passes by it once every couple of days, just in case.

He's not stupid enough to visit the Camarvan, not when Wilbur surely knows he survived the trap and can see that Phil and Techno are running the Empire the same as they ever have.

"The problem," George says to him one evening, when Sapnap is tangled up in his boyfriends and Dream is sprawled out across George's bed, "is that Wilbur's smart enough not to be obvious about his plans. It would be easier if we could bait him into a trap, but he knows that we know now."

"Has he said anything to you since the bombing?" Dream asks, dragging his foot over the cotton sheets, his arms set off to the side. Sam has been blissfully oblivious to the silent war raging between the two factions, something that both Dream and L'manburg have put effort into maintaining. He's the best fucking engineer in Purgatory, so no one really wants to see which side he'd choose if push came to shove.

"No." George's voice goes quieter, his goggles sitting next to Dream's arms and his dark eyes locked on his computer screen. "I haven't talked to him at all, really. It's like he's forgotten I exist."

There's a quiet sort of pain in that, one that Dream wants to soothe away with words of reassurance. But he still plans to kill Wilbur for the assassination attempt, so he says nothing, unable to offer George the comfort that he needs. It hurts, being on the opposing side to someone he loves, and Dream thinks it might hurt worse because Wilbur doesn't *know*.

Maybe, if he knew, things would be different. But he's seen the vicious gleam in Wilbur's eyes, watched with idle admiration as he tore through his competition and rose to the top in Limbo, Purgatory, his grasping hands clawing for any possible advantage over his opponents. Maybe things would be different—but Dream doesn't think so. Wilbur is a man driven, by madness and ambition both, and there is very little that can stand in the path of that.

"Hey," he says, when the silence has dragged out for entirely too long, "I love you. You know that, right?"

George smiles at him, honest and sad, and says, "Okay, simp."

---

Five weeks after Wilbur tries to kill him, they finally have a way to get revenge.

George has been in contact with a few other members of L'manburg, always carefully neutral in how he phrases things, always acting as if he doesn't want to cause problems. It's finally paying dividends, the subtle influence and careful questions yielding a point of contact. Eret's been sick of how things are run for a while now and, with the promise of support for their coup, they're willing to help bait the trap.

This is something too dangerous to talk about where Wilbur might be able to hear it, and when Dream messages Phil and Techno to tell them it's go time, he adds on that he wants to bring specific people up the elevator to Elysium. He won't risk George being spotted, and Sapnap doesn't have a chip—it's either the hidden shaft, or no trip at all.

"No," Phil says, flat and unamused. "No fuckin' way, it's not a joyride machine—"

"I know that," Dream hisses, leaning back against the door in George's Las Nevadas suite, his mask on and displaying an angry expression that no one is around to see. "I fucking know that. But I'm not bringing you down here when that will alert Wilbur, and we're sure as shit not talking about this over an unsecure connection—which we'd have to, with Sapnap and George."

"So you're just going to give them *my* secrets instead?"

"They know I'm an admin," Dream says, and that makes Phil go quiet. "They've known for years. Neither of them has told anyone, ever, and they know you're an admin too. They wouldn't dream of letting this slip. I'm not budging."

"Fuck me," Phil says eventually, blowing out a sigh that the server sends across their private line. "I'm starting to wish we'd kept you all docile and obedient and shit."

"Yeah, as if," Dream scoffs, and that's that.

When he tells Phil that he wants to have this discussion in person, it's only partially because he doesn't trust their comm lines to be secure. George is casual enough about going Topside, even though he hasn't been in years, but Sapnap is skeptical, his hands shoved in his pockets as Dream leads them through a winding, confusing path to the elevator. The skepticism only increases when he sees the tiny, simple elevator, unassuming and tucked away.

The ride up is quiet, Dream's attention split between the server and his friends. He swaps his usual mask out for his smiling one, tucking it up under his arm but making no attempt to change the rest of his outfit. They shouldn't be spotted by anyone else in the palace, but he wants to be able to talk out loud, and he's fine taking the risk.

"Topside looks like shit," Sapnap says when they step out into the tiny receiving room. Whatever he wants to say next dies in his throat as he takes in the sight of Technoblade leaning against the doorway, tall enough that his crown is at an angle to avoid knocking into the top of the frame. It's the first time they're meeting and Dream grins behind his mask at the unimpressed look on Techno's face.

“Are we meeting in the office or...?” He steps forward, George and Sapnap falling into step behind him, and Techno turns to lead them away. “I need to make a detour before we get there.”

“Dream,” Techno starts to say, exasperated, but Dream stops listening because they’re passing by a doorway that leads to the courtyard and Dream is grabbing Sapnap’s hand and dragging him outside.

It’s the perfect day for it. The sky is a blue so rich it could be chemical, white clouds scrubbing across it like marshmallow fluff, the sun shining down until the plant life in the courtyard is practically glowing. Sapnap looks unimpressed when Dream hauls him down to his knees, but his expression transforms the moment he touches the grass, eyes widening and lips parting. Tina has plants, real plants, around the outside of her cafe, an extravagant sort of decoration that means Sapnap knows the difference between plastic and the real thing.

“No fucking way,” he breathes, fingers fisting in the green blades, ignoring the way it stains his skin. “This is real?”

“Look up,” Dream tells him, before anchoring his fingers in the back of Sapnap’s shirt so he knows he won’t fly away. And Sapnap tips his head back, breath hitching as he gets lost in that endless expanse of blue, one hand still crushing the grass as his other one half-lifts like he can touch the clouds if he just tries hard enough.

George flops into the grass next to them, a faint smile on his face as he hooks his own hand around Sapnap’s sleeve. For a moment, there’s nothing else in the world, just the three of them and the pure wonder on Sapnap’s face, the breeze on their skin a cool contrast to the warmth of the sun.

“Well, at least you’re not doin’ this on top of a fountain this time,” Techno says, hooves crunching on the gravel path as he walks up behind them. Dream doesn’t look back, but he feels a broad hand land between his shoulders, Techno’s fingers running warm and fond down his spine.

“It’s fucking real,” Sapnap says, like he can’t believe it. Grinning so hard that his cheeks hurt, Dream knocks their heads together, then leans back into Techno’s touch and watches Phil appear from the other side of the courtyard. He strides across the grass, nodding once to George as Sapnap continues to ignore everything but the sky, then sits down with his legs folded and wings spread out behind him.

“I suppose we can have the discussion out here,” he says dryly, plucking a blade of grass and spinning it between his talons. “No one will be able to hear us.”

“C’mon, Pandas,” Dream says, shaking him a little. “It’s game time.”

It takes a minute, but Sapnap manages to tear his gaze off the sky. It’s a strangely comforting feeling, having Techno at his back, Phil’s knee brushing against his own, while Sapnap leans into his side and George completes the circle. In any other circumstance, he might suggest a picnic, really go old world with it, but they have a job to do.



“So, George, what’s the plan?” he asks, and George leans forward, tapping his goggles.

“I have a contact in L’manburg,” George says, sketching out plans against the grass with a finger. “Their name is Eret, and they’re one of the original members. They handle a lot of the business negotiations Topside, and they’re the one Wilbur has set up to infiltrate Hypixel once the Empire is crumbling.”

“Optimistic,” Phil says mildly, and Techno snorts.

“Thing is, Wilbur’s plan hinges on the Empire falling first. Right now, he can’t make any moves on Elysium or the big conglomerates, and we’re the only team good enough to get Topside—he knows that. Which means that until you get back down there and within his grasp, he can’t do anything to move his plan forward. The trick is making sure we control the battle ground.”

“He sent us an anonymous tip about Dream once,” Techno says, his palm dragging slowly up and down Dream’s back. “Think we could exploit that?”

George shakes his head. “It needs to look natural, and it needs to look like something Wilbur has to take care of himself. Otherwise he’ll just send Tommy to handle it, and we won’t be able to reach him.”

“He doesn’t get into fights often,” Dream adds. “He’s never been a fighter, it’s why he surrounds himself with people that are. It’ll take a lot to coax him out.”

“Or just very well placed bait,” George says, smiling thinly. “Did you know that L’Manburg has been having trouble holding onto their business in the Nether? Wilbur’s grip is slipping, and if he thinks that the Empire is using Technoblade’s old connections to undermine them...”

“He’ll stop at nothing to prevent that from happening,” Dream says thoughtfully.

“And I’m guessing that this isn’t his backyard, so he can’t set up his bombs the way he did the first time?” Phil asks, stretching one wing out slowly before folding it back in.

“Bingo.” Dream looks at George, chin tipped up, and asks, “So how are we baiting the trap?”

“This is what I’m thinking—”

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The Nether is sweltering. Dream’s bodysuit sticks to his skin, sweat beading up at the small of his back and down his neck, each breath he takes slow and careful in the confines of his mask. The refineries are down here, and the disposal stations—the Nether is where the Deep Down *began*, and it is miserable to live in. At least for most people; Sapnap is smiling as he crouches on the ventilation shaft next to Dream, and Techno is relaxed and easy as he strides down the corridor towards a section of the Nether riddled with blast doors.

Dream nods to Sapnap once Techno is out of sight, and they both drop silently to the ground, taking a different route entirely.

“L’manburg is five minutes out,” George says over comms. He’s set up in one of the relay rooms, a short jog away from the place the trap will spring from, waiting with Philza as both of them monitor streams direct from the server. He doesn’t have that kind of access on his own, but the fact that Phil is an admin opens doors for them both. “Eret says Wilbur is plotting something, but they’re not sure what.”

“That’s to be expected,” Dream says, gesturing for Sapnap to break off to intercept. With a two fingered salute, Sapnap moves away, drawing a sword that glows a dull orange from the heat channeled along its edge.

“Keep an eye out anyways. You’re outnumbered, and Eret doesn’t want to pull punches—if they’re going to take over the operation, they need to look like they weren’t part of this plan.” There’s a brief pause, then George adds, “Four minutes.”

“In position,” Techno drawls, low and easy. “Gonna be honest with you, I’m pretty sure I could take all of them on my own, but it’s real sweet of you to worry.”

“Fuck off and die,” Dream says, as Phil laughs and mutters, “You smug son of a bitch.”

There are sections of the city that extend for a ways before sluice gates and blast doors lock them down. Everything is airlocked, to one degree or another, because there needs to be a way to contain fires, floods, chemical spills too dangerous to let seep from one district to another. Elysium is the only exception that Dream knows of, and he thinks that’s probably because there’s no roof to anchor the gates against.

This section of the Nether is one of the least accessible. Every twenty yards, there’s a blast door, and while the metal around them is corroded and a rust red that looks like blood, the server’s influence is strong. It can control just about everything despite appearances, which makes this the perfect area to stage a fight.

“Three minutes,” George says as Dream hauls himself up onto a vent, tracking Sapnap’s location across the display on his retinas. Below him, Techno checks his comm like he’s waiting to meet someone. Technically, he is, but L’manburg doesn’t realize who it is that he’s really meeting.

The server flickers up a few location tags, making their way to him. Not as many as he’s expecting, but when he queries it, it tells him that only three members of L’manburg are chipped, and the rest are making sure not to carry comms. It’s an interesting fact that he files away for later.

“Two minutes.”

He dims his components, drawing his swords as he turns his mask towards the hall that leads directly to Techno. Sapnap’s tag starts moving closer, at an angle to hit the back half of the group right as they see Techno. Dream breathes, feeling the rush of adrenaline in his veins, and smiles.

“Thirty seconds. Good luck.” It’s the only thing George is willing to say on the matter, and he mutes comms a second later. There’s no time to feel even a flicker of guilt, because Tommy

rounds the corner and shouts when he spots Techno, three—five—all six of L'manburg's upper echelon right behind him.

"Go time," he breathes, right as Sapnap bursts from a side hallway and lunges to gut the closest person with a flaming sword.

Tommy is fast when he darts for Techno, but Dream is faster to drop down and lock blades with him, grinning like a madman behind his mask. He might as well have never bothered; Techno wades into the fight without hesitation, laughing as he plows through three people while Sapnap takes on two more. Tommy's remarkably good—there's a reason he's Wilbur's second in command—and Dream has to focus more on the fight than he'd like.

"Where's Wilbur?" he asks, knocking Tommy's sword away as he turns to scan the battlefield.

Phil's laugh, a wild cackle that matches Techno's almost perfectly, gives him his answer.

He spins, forgetting his real opponent for a second. There's Phil, who is *supposed* to be tucked away in a relay room to protect George, his wings spread wide and his sword flicking through the air like a beetle in the air. There's Wilbur, lifting his own sword up ineptly, the blued steel no match for netherite.

There's a curdling in his gut as he tries to spot the trap in Wilbur's manic, triumphant smile.

He's not trying to fight back, Dream thinks, before he's forced to turn back and focus on Tommy again. His moment of distraction earns him a nasty slice across the shoulder, right where his prosthetics begin, and he swears as his mask displays an enraged expression at the audacity. Tommy is grinning too, eyes fever bright with the excitement of battle, but Dream can't focus on that. Why wasn't Wilbur trying to fight back?

He tries to follow them as Wilbur dances further and further away from the group, Phil dancing with him like a cat playing with a favored toy, but Tommy keeps getting in the way. Dream doesn't *want* to kill him—he likes Tommy, even if the kid has shit taste in leaders—but if he has to do it to reach Phil—

Wilbur dances them all the way past the heavy metal divots in the floor and ceiling, the only sign of a blast door currently tucked away. Phil follows, a grin on his face, and it's only once he's past that point that Dream realizes what Wilbur is going to do.

"Phil!" he shouts over comms, not waiting for any acknowledgement as he knocks Tommy back a few steps, "*Bombs!*"

Phil hesitates, his gaze flickering over the walls, the floor, the ceiling, but he doesn't notice the way Wilbur is spreading his arms until it's too late. As his sword lunges forward, Wilbur opens the hand that isn't holding a sword, skin beginning to fade as the trigger falls. For a single, terrible moment, that's all Dream sees: Phil's sword, driving into Wilbur's gut, as Wilbur's coat flaps open and the explosives strapped to his chest become visible to everyone.

Then the blast door slam shut as hot air rushes out ahead of the fire they just barely contain, the sound so heavy that it makes Dream stumble as the rumble echoes through the hall.

*“Wilbur!”* Tommy screams, his diamond-edged blade dropping from numb fingers unseen. He scrambled forward, yanking at the blast doors like he can open them if he just tries hard enough as Dream stares at him, numb with shock. The blast doors remain firmly shut, even as Tommy slams his hands against them again and again, filed-down talons scraping against the old, worn metal.

The remaining members of L'manburg slow to a halt to watch as well, their eyes turning to Tommy's pale, frantic figure desperately trying to get through to the room where Phil and Wilbur—

Dream swallows, then looks around. Sapnap is bleeding from a nasty cut on one of his arms, and there's burns littering Tubbo's body. The one he thinks is called Jack, with more cybernetic implants than normal human flesh, lays out on the ground, but the server pings him with vital signs. Niki is clutching at her knee, unable to stand, and Techno looks utterly unmarred where he stands over the unconscious bodies of two others, axe held in one tight fist as his glowing eyes lock on the door.

Tommy is still screaming when the blast doors finally groan and start to open. He stops the moment the sight behind them comes into view.

Wilbur's bombs have ruined the corridor. One of Phil's wings hangs broken and shredded, chitin cracked under the paper-thin feathers, burns festering on his right side. Beneath him, skin flickering in and out of sight as his unconscious body tries to protect itself, is Wilbur—who escaped the blast, but still has Phil's sword buried in his gut, bleeding him out slowly. Both of them are still breathing, but Dream doesn't know how long that will last.

*Bring him to me,* the server says, no indication of which man it means.

He starts forward and is brushed aside by Technoblade, who scoops Phil up like he weighs nothing before turning back to him with a question in his eyes. They're deep within the Nether, but it's been decades since Techno was here last and he doesn't know the Deep Down like Dream does. In his mind, a map spills out, and his breath hitches as he realizes what the server wants.

Tommy looks up when Dream presses a hand down on his shoulder and flashes, GRAB HIM AND FOLLOW.

“What?” Tommy's voice is barely a hoarse whisper. Dream repeats the message, then walks past Techno and deeper into the dark halls below the city. He knows where he's going. Knows it better than the back of his ever changing hands.

Over comms, he hears Sapnap say, “I'll clean up here and keep an eye on them.” A glance back shows Tommy dragging Wilbur along, George appearing at his side seconds later to lift Wilbur's other arm over his shoulder. Between them, the man himself is a puppet with its strings cut, long limbs dragging and useless as he's hauled along.

He passes in front of Techno, taking the lead, and they're a strange, silent procession through the darkened corridors of the Nether. This section of the city is sealed off, the server forcing them on the path it wants them to follow, preventing any outsiders from intruding. Dream suspects that if they tried to turn back now, they would find the path blocked.

Tommy only tries to ask where they're going once, his voice faltering and then failing when no one answers. The only light is from the emergency LEDs lining the path, and then there isn't even that much ahead of them. Only a pit, bottomless and black, strangely warm for all that it feels like it should be frozen and empty. Only the Void, beckoning them to its edge.

Dream stops, then steps to the side so Techno can crouch at the edge of it. He pretends like he can't hear the words Techno whispers against Phil's hair, the near silent hitch in his breath before he opens his arms and lets go. There is no sound, as Phil falls into the Void—and then Tommy is screaming at them again.

*“Fuck you, he’s still alive, he’s still alive, I’m not fuckin’ throwin’ him down a fuckin’ pit, fuck you, fuck—”* He cuts himself off with an incoherent shout of rage when George surges forward anyways, dragging all three of them to the edge where Dream grabs Tommy and Techno grabs the barely breathing shape of Wilbur, Phil's sword still buried in his gut. *“No! Wilbur!”*

SHUT UP AND WATCH, Dream displays on his mask, the words static and flickering as Tommy fights to break free of his rigid grip. He can't, of course. Sam's work is some of the best, and Dream is making no effort to soften his bruising hold, all his focus on the blackness of the Void and the inaudible song of the server humming through it.

Tommy screams. Tommy cries. Tommy fights until he can't fight anymore, worn down by grief and the fight he'd lost and the unmoving determination in Dream's arms, and then he collapses to his knees and sobs like a broken thing as the rest of them stand vigil, George's lips pressed in a thin white line and Techno's fingers resting against his temple like he's got a headache.

For a long time, there is nothing but the sound of Tommy's hiccuping, wheezing sobs.

It takes time, it always does. Dream remembers when he fell, the way it had felt endless as the lights dimmed and blackness surrounded him, and he remembers the moment he realized he would never hit the bottom. Here, at the center of the city, buried deeper than any core, Dream thinks about falling. About love, in all its horrible glory.

Him? he queries, his breathing even and shallow. Are you sure?

Yes, the server sings back, possessive and adoring. Look at what he's done so far. Look at the lengths he'll go to for what he wants. Imagine what he will do when he knows how much I love him. Maybe he'll be almost as good as you.

There is a sound, the drag of air through lungs that had fallen out of use, the gasp of a man coming to life one last time. Tommy's head snaps up, his own breath faltering, and Dream tenses in preparation to catch him in case he tries to lunge for the hole in the center of the room.

One black taloned hand grabs the edge of the floor, then another. With a low groan, helped by coils of metal so black they seem to absorb the light, Phil hauls himself up out of the Void, his wings flapping once, twice, as he tries to catch his balance. The right one isn't whole, but the chitin is smooth again, and the burns have the gently healed look of old scars, not new ones. Techno grabs his arm and hauls him the rest of the way up, up, up into a tight hug that makes Phil wheeze.

"I'm okay, mate," he says, voice tender as his hands smooth up the broad expanse of Techno's back. "I'm okay. She's lookin' out for us, you know that."

"I could have lost you," Techno whispers, so softly that Dream is certain he didn't mean it to be heard by anyone else. In his arms, Phil hums softly, then slowly but surely disentangles himself and turns back towards the Void.

"Now, let's see what she's gone and done this time." He reaches down, and coils of wiring reach up, until his talons hook in the back of Wilbur's burnt and shredded jacket. When he hauls the man out, it's without any gentleness, and Wilbur lands on his knees with a gasp before reaching his shaking hands towards his face.

"God," he chokes out, glasses cracked and eyes wild, "what has it done to me? *What has it done?*"

Phil tangles his fingers in Wilbur's hair, dragging him back until he's looking up, and Dream has to tighten his grip on Tommy to keep him from lunging forward. He's never seen another admin chosen before and the contrast fascinates him; for him, the server was nothing but love once the pain was done. For Wilbur...

"Hi, mate," Phil says dryly, looming over Wilbur with his broken wings half-spread.

"Welcome to the club. You're one of hers now, for better or worse, and that thing you're feeling? That's love. That's love, for all your virtues and your vices, for all your wrongs and every bit of good you've ever done, for every piece of you no matter how vile or wonderful it is. That's the server, and you're never going to be rid of her now."

"I didn't ask for this," Wilbur says, tears rolling down his face, his melodious voice harsh with terror. "God, *fuck*, I didn't want this!"

TOO BAD, Dream flashes, finally letting Tommy go when Phil steps away from Wilbur's crumpled form. UR ONE OF US NOW. GET USED TO IT.

"Wil, Wilbur, Wil, it's *me*," Tommy whispers, arms wrapped tight around Wilbur's neck as he curls into the empty space of Wilbur's lap, a tangle of limbs and awful affection. Wilbur's hands twitch, then reach up to stroke Tommy's hair back, even as his fixed gaze stays locked on the ceiling.

"I didn't ask for this," he whispers, and Tommy clings tighter like he can anchor Wilbur with love alone. And maybe he can. But he's not Wilbur's only anchor anymore, and Dream tells the server to keep an eye on them both as he turns to walk away, Techno and Phil close on his heels.

George waits for them by the entrance to the hall, his goggles turned towards the slumped figures by the edge of the Void.

“You want me to push you in too so he’s got a reason to go rescue you?” Dream asks over comms, reaching one metal hand out to tangle his fingers with George’s fragile flesh ones.

“I’ve told you, I don’t like mods,” George says softly, turning away and not looking back.

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Admins can't kill other admins. L'manburg focuses on Hypixel instead, and Dream wishes them the best of luck in that endeavor.

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His palms flatten across Techno’s chest as he grinds down, breath catching on a sob as another surge of cum spills into him. His thighs are quivering, entire body taut as he hovers on the edge of another orgasm, and Techno groans softly as he rocks up into Dream, his fingers digging bruises into Dream’s hips.

There’s a click of a lock, one that neither of them pay any attention to, and Dream lets out a ragged, desperate cry when he comes and clenches down, milking Techno for everything he’s worth.

“Now there’s a pretty sight,” Phil murmurs from behind him, the hard points of his talons trailing over Dream’s spine. “And how long have you two been up here, hm?”

“Phil...” Techno groans, lifting his hips and driving another choked sob out of Dream’s throat.

“Since the meeting was over, I’m betting.” Phil’s teeth brush over the soft skin of Dream’s shoulder and he shudders, spotting the dark shape of Phil’s wings out of the corner of his eyes. “Hours and hours up here, just the two of you, working yourselves up while you waited for me.”

“Please,” Dream gasps, trying to breathe even as pleasure washes over him in a tide of red. He can’t focus on anything but the shallow, desperate thrusts, Techno’s muscles tensing under him as he ruins Dream for everyone else, even the dig of talons into his skin fading into the background noise of pure ecstasy.

“I think I’m going to fuck my husband now. Means you’ll be stuck here for a while longer, Dream.” His palm settles over the bulge in Dream’s stomach, lips brushing over his jaw right at the edge of the mask. “Can you take him for that long, sweetheart?”

He chokes on a whimper, letting his head loll back against Phil’s shoulder as Techno arches underneath him, thighs spreading wide in invitation. There’s a broken, pleading whine from below him, Techno’s voice cracking as he begs, but Phil just laughs as his wings wrap around them all, covering them in darkness as his clothes rustle and he starts kissing his way down Dream’s spine. Techno’s hands smooth over him as Phil’s mouth slides lower and Dream’s lips part as he—

*I love you, he mouths, in silent synchronization with the server, lips hidden where they curve into a smile, because you are love.*



## End Notes

dream: love is when you fundamentally remake yourself from the ground up for someone

techno: haha

techno:

techno: oh no you were being serious

[anyways come bother me on tumblr](#)

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